

# Midlands Voices

## Omaha's friendliness made the difference

BY KAORI YOMOTOSE

*The writer, of Kasugai City, Japan, recently returned to her homeland after studying intensive English at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The following is excerpted from her graduation speech at UNO this month.*

I remember the day I came to Omaha: Aug. 18, 2007. I remember vividly that I came here with hopes and fears in my mind.

I was crying at the airport in Japan while I was eating a rice ball that my mom made for me. I was crying again in the airplane to Omaha. The old woman next to me glanced at me many times. Of course, my heart leaped with excitement, but I was moved to tears because I was worried about my Omaha life.

I can't tell you how many times I have cried during the past four months. I was under a lot of stress and pressure from three things: language difficulties, getting used to Omaha and — my laptop.

At first, the language difficulties made me really nervous. I lost confidence in my English skills. I couldn't understand what people said, and I couldn't get other people to understand what I wanted to say.

Above all, the telephone was one of my difficulties I had to get over. I really like talking with people, but after I came here, I got nervous every time someone called me or I had to call someone.

For the first week, my jet lag caused a lack of sleep. Then I moved to a different place. Sometimes I felt depressed because I missed my family and friends. Nothing seemed to go well.

Then my laptop suddenly died. Before I came here, I was worried that it would break someday. Sometimes it wouldn't work well for a couple of days or connect to the Internet. It was giving me a headache all the time. But who would have expected it would finally break here in Omaha?

For me, the laptop is my lifeline to Japan. So, even though my room, home, school and sometimes parties in Omaha should be places to have fun, I cried alone and even in front of my friends.

But in Omaha, I got much more happiness than crying! I met a lot of wonderful friends

from all over the world, exciting teachers and other people in Omaha.

I tried to go everywhere, meet various people to talk and communicate in English and make friends. I visited communities outside Omaha and, of course, went to classes and events in the Intensive English Language Program at UNO.

I really like the people here. Everyone is friendly, smiling

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and kind. When I was depressed, many words supported me a lot: "Your English is really good"; "I can understand what you want to say."

When I faced some roadblocks, I was also helped: "Everything will be good!" "You can do it!"

I like people in Omaha very much. I'll say it again: I like the people in Omaha very much.

Living with a host family was another one of the biggest special things for me. Host family members were open-hearted and friendly. I learned a lot by communicating with them every day. Birthday parties, Halloween, Thanksgiving — I have a lot of great memories. I also made a lot of friends with my host brother and sister's friends.

The language difficulties, getting used to Omaha and my laptop bring back some difficult, sad, lonely and sentimental memories for me. However, the past four months are treasures for me. UNO is really a wonderful place. Omaha is heaven for me.

Because I tried hard at everything, I can say that every day was special. If I were to give you advice for when you travel abroad, it would be to be patient and wait for your own good memories. Try to do many things like me, and you can also have your own great days.

I couldn't overcome being a crybaby, but Omaha made me and my morale more mature and a little stronger. I appreciate everyone in Omaha. Thank you, everyone. I love Omaha!

I will cry, once again — this time when I leave Omaha.