The official newsletter of the Mirabella family!

The Mirabellas in Japan

Back in the US!

Dear Friends,

If you haven't heard yet, we arrived back in the US in July for a nine-month Home Ministry Assignment, meaning that we will spend this time primarily visiting our supporting churches and re-connecting with friends and family.

Airport goodbyes

A lot of people ask us about "reverse-culture shock" when we return to the US. This is a term referring to how people who have lived for an extended period away from their home culture, experience feelings of disorientation upon their return.

Here are some things that really stood out to me:

1. Walking into a store without wearing a mask. In Japan there is still an expectation that everyone should wear a mask to prevent the spread of Corona. The first few times I got out of my car and went into stores and restaurants, I felt like I was naked! It was quite a shock to go from a place where 99% of the people are wearing masks, to a place where about 90% are not. As a side note, shortly after arriving in the US in July, our whole family got Covid! Actually, we are pretty sure that Karen and AJ picked it up in Japan, or on the plane, before spreading it to the rest of the family. We ended up quarantining in an Airbnb house for a week while we passed through the whole family. It actually worked out well for us to rest, get over jet-lag, and binge watch K-dramas and Japanese anime.

CCSI Youth Group at our house in Japan

2. Lightning bugs, squirrels, and dew on the ground. According to my Google research, there are lightning bugs and squirrels in Japan, but I don't think I have ever seen any. I never thought about it until we got back and I saw them and realized it had been four years since I had seen any. As far as dew is concerned, I think that atmospheric physics works the same in Japan as it does here, but either because I don't walk a lot on grass, or because the sun rises so much earlier there, it just really struck me the first time I went outside to walk the dog and my shoes got soaked. The part of Chiba City where we live is considered "suburban" by Japanese standards, but it feels urban to us - not as much as downtown Tokyo would be, but with pavement everywhere, stores within walking distance, public transportation available, and houses packed tight together, it is nothing like a typical American suburb.

3. Inflation! We have been blessed these past couple years by a strong dollar and a weak yen, meaning that (despite some inflation in Japan) almost everything we bought felt like it was on sale. Getting home and seeing some of the prices at the grocery store was a bit of a shock to the system. The truth is, our family can eat out at a delicious sushi restaurant in Japan for a lot cheaper than we can at Chick Fil-A here. Also in Japan, you NEVER tip the wait-staff or the folks working behind the counter, but still get amazing service! On the other hand, we have never paid less than a dollar per liter for gasoline, so the equivalent of $4 a gallon is the norm, and a tiny jar of peanut butter in Japan costs more than a giant tub in the US!

Family Update:
Our kids continue to grow and transition through stages of life.

The only decent family photo we managed to get

Kylie and Josiah returned to Japan as the pandemic was starting in early 2020. Kylie spent about 6 months in Japan before returning for her final year of college at James Madison. She is now in her second year of graduate school, still at JMU, studying Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Josiah stayed in Japan with us until we returned this summer. He spent time studying Japanese and then did some online classes through Northern Virginia Community College while also working part-time. He is currently living in Oakton, VA, working and continuing classes at NoVa.

AJ graduated from Covenant Community School International in July and started at Covenant College, near Chattanooga, TN, in August. It was bittersweet dropping her off at school and saying goodbye. One blessing was that another MTW family that we work with in Japan, whose son also graduated from CCSI, is also a freshman at Covenant this year. We are looking forward to her coming home over Fall Break!

Proud parents of a Covenant College freshman!

Matthias and Leighton are sophomores at Turner Ashby High School in Rockingham County, Virginia. Leighton is singing in the choir and last week attended her first high school football game! Matthias really enjoys studying science and is taking a guitar class. The four of us are living in Bridgewater, VA, a small town in the Shenandoah Valley, near Harrisonburg. They are excited for their uncle to start working after-school jobs soon, and we will be teaching them to drive this fall! We are hoping to do some college visits while we are here. When we return to Japan, they will only have two years left until graduation.

As for Karen and I, Karen has started taking a quilting class and is helping out occasionally at a dental office where she used to work. I was able to attend a day of the Washington Commanders (formerly Redskins) training camp, and will get to go to a game later this year. As a Washington sports fan, I am continually beaten down, but hope springs eternal! More than anything, we are just thankful to get to spend time with our families and catch up with friends we haven't seen in four years.

Schedule Plans
We are still finalizing our schedule with missions conferences and church visits, including planned trips to Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Florida. We had our first "official" visit this past Sunday to a church in Maryland, where I was able to preach and serve communion before sharing at a luncheon after worship. By God's grace (and YOUR generosity), our giving has remained steady over these last four years, so we don't have a great deal of new support to raise, for which we are very thankful. These trips are mainly for reporting back and thanking people.

The blessing (and curse?) of technology, is that we are able to stay connected with a lot of our ministry in Japan over Zoom. We often have individual meetings over Zoom, and so far this month I have attended our MTW team meeting, board meetings for CCSI and our Open House English ministry, a session meeting for Alive International, and another for a new church plant in Chiba City and Karen serves weekly as a small group leader over Zoom for the Parakaleo training program.

Ministry in Japan
Of course, life goes on in Japan without us. It is so difficult to leave our life and ministry for an extended period of time, because we know that much of our responsibilities need to be picked up by others.

CCSI – the new school year has begun! After graduating a large class of 7 and having 3 others leave for the year, we expected the school to shrink in size, but the Lord has provided 13 new students! Please pray for our missionaries Katie and Rachel, and our interns Benjamin, Elizabeth, and Tara, as well as other Japanese and international staff. Pray as well for our math and science teacher Linda who is also on HMA right now.

Open House – After two years, we have all our missionaries back on the field. Please pray for continued growth of our children's English ministry classes and for a Thanksgiving outreach event we are planning.

Oyumino Christ Church – Will be celebrating their 30-year anniversary this month (we are sad we won't be there for it!). Please pray for the pastors of OCC that God would bless and encourage them and their families. They work very hard and the church is going through challenging budget and vision discussions.

Church Planting – Our team is beginning outreach activities in an area called Kisarazu, in hopes of starting a church there in the future. Kisarazu is about 45 minutes south of our current location and is where the "Aqualine" tunnel/bridge connects from Yokohama to the Chiba peninsula. It is increasingly a bedroom community for people working in Yokohama and Tokyo, and we are excited about starting a new work there.

Scouting trip to Kisarazu

Prayer Requests

- For CCSI and OH missionaries and staff, as well as the ministries
- For OCC pastors and their families
- For outreach activities in Kisarazu
- For new interns in the spring and next fall
- For our family during our time back in the States

Thanks so much for your prayers and support for our ministry. If you are interested in joining our monthly support team, you can follow this link GIVING. We hope to see as many of you as we can during this time back in the States!

In Christ,
Tom

Here is our US contact information for this year:

Address: 103 Dinkel Ave, Bridgewater, VA 22812
Phone and iMessage: (Tom) 540-363-2307, (Karen) 540-810-5690

Links to learn more about our ministries:
Chiba AO Team
CCSI
Internship Opportunities