

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed my school last spring, it seemed as though time stopped. Now—as I have for the past ten months—I sit at my desk for over twelve hours every day, thinking that the familiarity of home has become almost too familiar. However, time stops for nothing, not even the pandemic’s presence.

So, how did I handle being in quarantine? In short: terribly. Besides going on the occasional walk, I spent days in bed, abandoned hobbies, and lost touch with some friends. To make matters worse, I had volunteered to be a summer camp counselor, but was completely discouraged after hearing the news that it would be virtual.

Who would think that six hours of virtual camp was fun? What would I do to keep these kids attentive and not playing Tetris on another window? Would anyone register to begin with? These questions rattled around in my head in the weeks prior to the start of camp, and the closer that date came, the more I wanted to quit. After all, how could an online camp ever foster the same bonds that an in-person camp does?

Despite my doubts, I stayed. Despite my doubts, kids registered. Despite all the hardship, not only had returning campers registered, families from all over the country caught wind of a small summer camp in Philadelphia. Kids from California, Texas, and New York were logging onto Zoom every morning, unbothered by time differences. Though we could not do field trips or compete in our annual Iron Chef cook-off, I enjoyed spending time with the kids through online games and activities. We even managed to film and present a skit for parents to watch. Needless to say, summer flew by.

Technology has allowed me to meet people across the country, but I want to send my connections even further: internationally and particularly to Japan. A homestay in Japan would immerse me in the vibrant culture and grant me the opportunity to meet new people. I would like to spend time with my host family, get to know their lifestyle, and share our cultural differences. While some claim differences separate people, I see it as an opportunity to grow and learn to see things from a new perspective.

Additionally, a language class allows me to further connect with people in Japan, who I hope to create lasting relationships with. Like the kids in California attending a summer camp across the country, I could call and message the friends I made in Japan, despite being an ocean away. Technology has given us countless advantages during the pandemic, and I would like to utilize them given this opportunity. Ultimately, our time together is finite; we may see each other one day and leave the next. Yet, it is not the physical that is essential, but rather the connections we form that we carry with ourselves for the rest of our lives, should we only continue to keep in touch, and speak to each other.