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The Everyday Leader

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Leadership

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In the bustling metropolises as well as the tranquil countryside of Japan, Spring heralds the arrival of a breathtaking spectacle – cherry blossom season. For seven memorable years, I had the privilege of immersing myself in the beauty and tradition of this enchanting time, living as an American expatriate in the Land of the Rising Sun.

The allure of cherry blossoms, or “sakura,” runs deep in Japanese culture, intertwining history, poetry, and societal customs. Each year, as Winter gives way to Spring, delicate pink and white blooms blanket the landscape, casting a spell of fleeting beauty and profound significance.

As an American woman, I was captivated by Japan’s charm and found myself anticipating the arrival of sakura season each year in late March to early April. It wasn’t just about witnessing nature’s splendor; it was about embracing a cultural phenomenon that transcended mere aesthetics.

Cherry blossom viewing, or “hanami,” is a cherished tradition that brings people together in parks, gardens, and along riversides to revel in the ephemeral beauty of the blossoms. Picnics are spread beneath the trees, sake is poured, and laughter fills the air as friends and families gather to celebrate renewal and the transient nature of life.

But beyond the festivities, cherry blossoms evoke a sense of nostalgia deeply rooted in Japanese antiquity. Dating back centuries, sakura has been immortalized in literature, art, and folklore as a symbol of beauty, impermanence, and the transient nature of existence.

During my time in Japan, I learned to appreciate not only the aesthetic beauty of cherry blossoms but also the cultural nuances that surrounded their presence. From the meticulous hanami preparations to the quiet reverence of viewing the blooms, every aspect of sakura season felt like a cherished ritual.

How seamlessly Japanese cultural beliefs and norms became ingrained in my daily life. Simple gestures like removing shoes before entering a home, walking someone to a door and watching until their departure or using a special dish to honor someone at a meal became second nature, reflecting the deep respect and mindfulness ingrained in Japanese society.

Interestingly, I still do these things though they are not recognized here. I offer the seat furthest from the door to my guests to honor them; I’m sure they do not know why. Somewhere and somehow, inside me, I am satisfied as it feels I have acted in the most appropriate manner.¹⁹

It has been 20 years since returning to my home country of America and yet I still find myself grappling with a sense of disconnection – a feeling of being caught between two worlds. The customs and traditions of my own country at times seem odd in some ways. Especially in this time, the memories of many cherry blossom seasons serve as a bittersweet reminder of a different and perhaps deeper life I had once lived.

In Japan, there’s a concept known as “natsukashii,” which roughly translates to “nostalgic” or “dear to one’s heart.” It’s a feeling that encompasses both longing and fondness for the past, a sentiment that often arises for me during cherry blossom season as memories of Springs gone by with friends long ago come flooding back.

As I watch the cherry blossoms blooming here in my home state of Indiana, I can’t help but feel a pang of longing for Japan. But amidst the wistful reminiscence, there’s also a profound

clients across technology, aerospace, logistics, life sciences, professional services, advanced manufacturing and agriculture industries. She also contributes to Forbes Business Council as a member and author of articles on site selection and incentives topics. Jenny is passionate about innovation, sustainability, and intercultural communication. She has completed studies in entrepreneurship, psychology, and crowdfunding at the Wharton School and HEC Paris, and has lived and worked in Japan for seven years and is classically trained as an archaeologist. She enjoys beekeeping, sailing and traveling in her spare time.

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appreciation for the experiences that shaped me into who I am today, and the exceptional connections and friendships forged across cultures.

We can learn so much from one another.

My journey through cherry blossom seasons in Japan taught me invaluable lessons about the richness of cultural exchange and the depth of human connection. By immersing myself in Japanese traditions and customs, I not only expanded my worldview but also gained a profound appreciation for the beauty of diversity.

Listening to the stories embedded within Japanese culture, watching the meticulous rituals surrounding cherry blossom season, and learning from the deep-rooted values of respect and mindfulness have left an indelible mark on my life. These experiences have shaped the way I interact with others, fostering a sense of empathy and understanding that transcends borders.


As leaders, we must recognize the immense value of embracing diversity and fostering inclusive environments where individuals from different backgrounds can thrive. By listening to the voices of diverse cultures, watching, and learning from their unique perspectives, we can cultivate innovation, creativity, and resilience within our organizations.

Just as cherry blossoms bloom more vibrantly when they come together in full splendor, so too do we as individuals and communities flourish when we embrace the richness of our collective experiences. By recognizing that we are better together, we can create a world where every voice is heard, every perspective is valued, and every individual can reach their full potential.

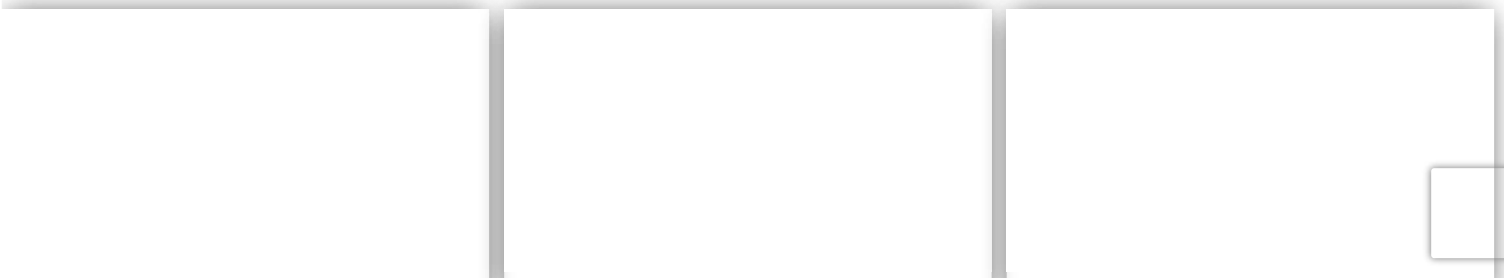
The Counselors of Real Estate have recognized this very principle of inclusivity and respect for other cultures and voices and have expanded our global reach by establishing new chapters in Canada, Europe, and Asia. The Asian chapter is comprised of eight members based in Japan, which is near and dear to my heart. Efforts are also underway to include South America in our expansion endeavors, aiming to solidify our position as a truly global organization of thought leaders.

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