

優良賞/日米協会会長賞	西宮 莉杏さん 松山東雲中学・高等学校 3 年	愛媛県
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1 カ月間のアメリカ留学。私の心を強く捉えたのがハグでした。はじめて交わしたハグ。心をつなぐものでした。オバマ元大統領が広島訪問で見たハグ。HUG の持つ力 (Healing, Understanding, Giving) と平和の願いを伝えたくてエッセイにしました。

HUG – Healing, Understanding, Giving

While studying in the United States, I exchanged hugs with many Americans. It wasn't just during special occasions—hugs happened when we first met, when saying goodbye, and in many everyday moments. Hugging is a natural part of American culture. At first, I couldn't hide my confusion. I had never experienced such casual physical closeness. But over time, I got used to it and began to understand the quiet power of a hug.

Before I embraced this custom, I felt distant from others. I couldn't speak English well, and I doubted whether I could truly connect with people. But as I grew more comfortable with hugging, I felt a sense of security begin to form between me and the Americans around me. It was as if the simple act of a hug allowed me to be seen and accepted, even without words.

As I became more familiar with hugs, I began to recall a powerful image from my childhood: the hug between former President Barack Obama and a Japanese man in Hiroshima. In May 2016, President Obama visited Hiroshima—the first sitting U.S. president to do so—and delivered a speech calling for a world without nuclear weapons.

During the event, a Japanese man invited by the American side approached Obama. He wanted to thank the president in his own words, without an interpreter. But overwhelmed by emotion, he became speechless. His body trembled, and tears ran down his cheeks. In that moment, President Obama embraced him.

Later, the man said, "I think the purpose was to calm me down. Since we couldn't exchange words, the hug became our way of communicating. It gave me a sense of security." That moment, brief but full of meaning, was reported widely in both Japan and the United States. It became a symbol of peace—a hug between two people from nations once divided by war.

A hug is the most peaceful weapon we can offer each other. Unlike conventional weapons that

cause pain and division, a hug brings comfort, healing, and connection. Its silent touch speaks louder than words, melting anger and fear without a single blow. Whether between friends, strangers, or even former enemies, a hug has the power to restore trust and humanity. In a world often torn by conflict, this gentle gesture reminds us that peace begins with empathy.

Psychologists say hugs trigger oxytocin, the “love hormone.” It calms the body, lowers stress, and strengthens emotional bonds. But beyond science, hugs speak to the human heart. A friend I met in America once told me, “A hug shows love and gives comfort—not just to the person receiving it, but also to the one giving it.” I believe that hugs offer something even greater: a quiet kind of peace.

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” I believe hugs are powerful too—not in force, but in peace. A hug doesn’t destroy—it heals. It doesn’t divide—it connects. Just like education opens minds, hugs open hearts. And when minds and hearts are open, the world can truly change.

Through my experiences in America and the memory of Hiroshima, I’ve come to believe that hugs are more than gestures. They are symbols of hope, understanding, and grace. In Japan, where hugging isn’t part of our culture, I don’t wish to erase tradition—but I do hope people become curious. Even a small interest in the culture of hugging could lead to deeper connections across borders.

I dream of a society where people can meet across borders without fear—where cultural differences open doors, not close them. In such a world, even a simple hug can become the first step toward peace. Quietly and gently, a hug allows us to communicate compassion with each other, reminding us that true connection often begins without words.

I believe HUG stands for Healing Heart, Understanding Uniqueness, and Giving Goodwill. Let’s walk the path of healing and cross the bridge of understanding together. And let your “light of giving” shine. The world is waiting for us where our hearts unite.