



NEWS FROM

HOINA

HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

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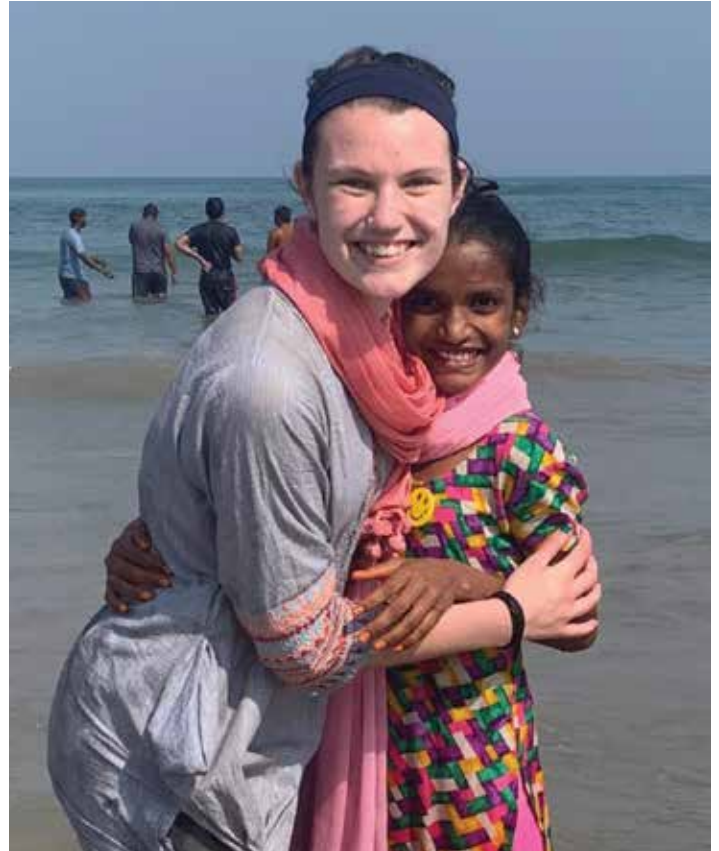
Where Do We Belong?

By Emily Clark

York College of Pennsylvania Student

Before traveling to Vishikahpatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India, the farthest I had ever been from home was Santa Monica, CA. I had traveled out of the country only one time, which was to Jubot, Haiti. Traveling gives me severe anxiety. My mind is always full of ideas. “What will the traveling be like?” “How will the people of the country view me?” “How will I be able to communicate with the language barrier?” These worries were overwhelmingly present during the days leading up to my travel as well as during the journey itself. I found myself absorbed in prayer with my family as an attempt to find some sense of calmness and serenity. How could I feel at home in a place more than 8,000 miles away?

The trip to India was excruciating. Our flight from the United States to India felt as if it took years, even though it only took about 16 hours. As part of our international service learning course, our instructor and guide, Dr. Fyfe [HOINA Vice President] asked us to begin a “list of firsts” in preparation for the trip. One of the first things I listed was that people in the airport were taking pictures of us. I also listed that there was a noticeable communication barrier. Before my trip, I heard students who had already studied abroad and volunteered at HOINA say that they considered India, as well as the orphanage, a “home away from home,” but my feelings at that moment did not align with theirs. Feeling comfortable in India took some time, and the sense of belonging took even longer.



Emily and Mehana

The first morning at HOINA, I woke up feeling exhausted, hungry, and incredibly homesick. My first thoughts were “I can’t do this. I’ll never make it here. How can I feel comfortable with the children? We have so little in common.” Despite my anxiety, I was excited to meet them because I knew that they would have so many new things to teach me. What I didn’t know was that, from my first interactions with them, they would begin changing my life in a way I never thought they could.

We were obviously out of place wherever we went. Although we tried to blend in by wearing churidars and sarees and, as women, behaving in a way that was

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respectful of cultural expectations, it was obvious that we were foreigners. Often when we were out with the HOINA kids, the locals stared and took pictures. Sometimes, they even asked the kids about us. Once, when we were visiting the Bora Caves in Araku Valley, a woman approached one of the older boys, Immanuel, and asked him in Telugu, “Where do these girls belong?”

Without missing a beat, Immanuel responded, “They are our sisters.” Before this moment, I still felt unable to connect with the children at HOINA because our backgrounds seemed too dissimilar. Hearing Immanuel refer to us in a way that made us sound like family broke that barrier. His small comment aided in my ability to finally connect with the children. At that moment, India felt like home.

One of the biggest lessons that the children of HOINA taught me was that even though we live more than 8,000 miles apart and have differences in culture, structure, and personal ideals, most of us share common goals, characteristics, values, and desires. Realizing how similar I am to these amazing kids

helped me realize how important it is to stand out, not blend in—something the children of HOINA have already figured out.

In India, most of the schools focus primarily on STEM studies rather than art and music. The HOINA children don’t let this fact stop them. They have created beautiful murals, songs, dances, and plays to incorporate the importance of art and help them stand out in their corner of the world. They also choose to be resilient during adversity and always have a smile on their faces.

The most important thing that I took away from this experience is that no matter how different or out of place you may feel in a situation, you’re never much different from the people around you. Knowing how similar we are should keep you grounded. But, just because we are similar, doesn’t mean you have to blend in. We were born to let our differences shine. So be like the HOINA kids: dance like you have a scorpion in your pants, sing at the top of your lungs, and create games with outrageous rules.



On HOINA President Darlene Large’s last trip to India, she enjoyed overseeing some landscaping work including adding to the Letti Obradovich Flower Garden and the Joan Hart Rose Garden, pictured left and above.

My Time With Lydia

By Katie Kennedy

York College of Pennsylvania Student

During my time at HOINA I bonded with many of the children, but none were quite like Lydia. From our first day on HOINA's campus, I knew that she was one special girl; and we bonded very quickly. At the start she was slightly bashful in approaching me; yet, later she latched onto me so tightly whenever I was around that I couldn't move while she was holding onto me. I must inform you that Lydia has a learning disability with a developmental delay. To what extent these disabilities take hold on her life no one is quite sure, but I believe that these challenges are what make Lydia so special in her own way.

One night after dinner while the HOINA girls were working on homework with help from our student group from York, Lydia was not paired with anyone. When she noticed an empty spot on the floor, she quickly left her own homework to come sit beside me. I was reading a storybook to a few of the other girls when Lydia placed herself right beside me to listen to the story. She clung to my arm as I read the story, and so our bond with each other began.

After that night I was greeted every single morning as I walked from the guest house to the girls' home for breakfast by a smiling Lydia who would wrap me up in one of her loving embraces. She would say to me, "Good morning, Akka," to which I would respond, "Good morning, Lydia, how are you?" Our small talk would continue for a few moments all while she was holding onto me tightly. Whenever I was not around the girls' home, some of my fellow York College students would approach me, telling me that Lydia was asking about or looking for me. I woke up every morning looking forward to spending the day with Lydia after she ran to me with open arms, her face bright and happy.

Only later at HOINA did I learn more about Lydia's story because her joyful nature surely didn't betray the truth of her rocky start in life. Lydia was a very sick baby and faced many challenges right from birth.



The author poses with Lydia

These challenges were not easy to overcome, and many people did not think she would survive them. Most included the prediction that Lydia would never walk or talk because of how serious her complications were. To me, Lydia's story and the bond I was able to share with her perfectly explain the blessing that HOINA provides these children. Without HOINA, Lydia would never have been able to run up to me every morning with a smile, embracing me in a hug so tight I wish I could have brought it back home.

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Kids Helping Kids



One of our HOINA supporters in the U.S. has children who desperately want to visit HOINA in India. At left are Israel, Gabriel, and Rachel taking donations for their lemonade stand. We love to see the next generation's passion and initiative to help their peers across the world.