



NEWS FROM

HOINA

HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

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Expanding Horizons

By Julie Nester

York College of Pennsylvania Student

Traveling was never a dream of mine. In fact, I thought it was not only a waste of money, but a waste of time. I would tell my older sister, “Whatever they have over there, I have right here.” Wow, was I wrong.

In the summer of 2019 I took a trip to Boston, Massachusetts, and all of a sudden the fire was lit inside of me. I had a taste of something different. Something better. So I felt compelled to see more. During my freshman year of college, I heard about a trip to India. I thought that it would be a breeze, a fun way to spend my winter break; however, after I signed up, got accepted, and paid, something inside of me changed. I got nervous. Worried about how long I would be gone and if I would adjust to traveling halfway around the world with fifteen other girls I had never met before. As the weeks passed, I tried everything to avoid talking about my upcoming trip, but before I knew it I was on a plane to Visakhapatnam.

We landed and, frankly, I was miserable—nauseous, sweaty, and entirely overwhelmed. It was the longest flight I had ever been on and, needless to say, the furthest I have ever been from home. While my traveling companions were excited and full of anticipation, I wondered if I would ever feel that way.

My first morning at HOINA was a morning I will never forget. We gathered at a table in the dining hall for breakfast, and I instantly felt at peace. We were laughing, cracking jokes, and everything seemed



Julie and Eliza got to visit the Vizag zoo with some of the HOINA boys. The boys were so excited to share all they knew about the animals at the zoo.

normal. The housemother took care of us and made me feel more at home than any place in America ever has. The food was different, but I wasn't hesitant to try it. The environment cleansed any and all of my prior worries.

After eating we spent the day touring the beautiful campus, met some of the staff, and spent some time with the younger children. Little did I know that the best part of the trip was yet to come.

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In the evening we got to study with the children. Alexis, a volunteer worker, stood in the courtyard and asked me what subject I would feel comfortable helping some of the girls with. I confidently told her, "history," before realizing I know nothing about Indian history. I waited for one of the girls to come to me to ask for help, but none of them did. A few seconds had passed when Durga came up to me and asked me to study with her. I sat with her and learned very quickly she didn't need help, but rather she saw me standing awkwardly and wanted to help me. From there on we spent our evenings teaching each other about our own country's history. Durga is brilliant: she had an answer to each and every question I asked her. I have never met a smarter teenager.

If I would have known how comfortable I was going to feel from the very first day, I would never have been nervous for even a second before leaving America. Durga and I spent all three weeks together; she truly was my little sister. We played every game together, she taught me Telugu, and even held me accountable for attending morning prayer. She made me feel safe every



Durga with Julie and pup

time we visited Kothavalasa, or Visak, the larger cities in the area.

I had feared being alone, but I wasn't. I had my HOINA sisters with me every day. They showed me love, happiness, and peace. I learned gratitude and what it means to be truly content. The evenings I shared with Durga, watching the other girls play, were so special. We talked about history, our dreams, and who we want to become. I never wanted to leave. It amazed me to even think that at one point I had dreaded going. This experience changed who

I am, and as cliché as that sounds, it's true. I pray for Durga every day and for the woman she will become. Things are different in India, but HOINA has saved the children from experiencing the evil in the world. They all have hearts of gold and deserve so much more than the world wants to give them.

I would hop on a plane today if it meant I could spend one more minute at HOINA. I hope to be able to go back one day to see the incredible men and women that HOINA has raised.

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Attached at the Hip

By *Eliza Zapata*
York College of Pennsylvania
Student

My name is Eliza Zapata, and I am entering my senior year at York College of Pennsylvania. I am studying sociology with the intent to become a social worker and family educator. I was drawn to this class because I love kids, and I love learning about other cultures. Before departing on this trip, we were assigned a research paper about a topic that applied to our major. Since I knew we would be at HOINA, I decided to focus my research on the factors that cause a child to become orphaned. I found that a lot of the factors are associated with poverty, illness, and the structure and norms of Indian society. While my research was fascinating, it was also heartbreaking. Reading information about the terrible things that so many kids have to go through was really hard. Reading about the poverty and lack of sanitation felt unreal. Learning the nuances of the family structure and lack of social support provided by Indian government was angering. At this point, I wasn't really sure that I was prepared to handle traveling to India. The things that I found were disheartening.

Honestly, the research made me rethink my future career. I wasn't sure if I would really be able to carry the emotional load of such hard things. It's easy to lose hope in



Eliza and Harika

humanity when you are constantly exposed to social injustice that seems unfixable. I have to admit, after my research paper I was really discouraged. I didn't want to go to India and learn that everything I found in my research was true. My doubts were overwhelming, especially having come this far and being so close to graduating. The thought that maybe I wasn't cut out for this type of work was really scary.

Fortunately, all this changed when I met Harika. Our first actual interaction with the children was when we were asked to help them do their homework. I was really nervous; I didn't speak a word of Telugu, and I had no clue what to say or what to talk about. One of the house moms asked the girls to raise their hands if they needed help. Harika raised her hand excitedly (even though she didn't have any homework), and we talked for almost two hours. We had almost nothing in common, but we became

the best of friends. Ever since that first day, we were attached at the hip. We played games during free time, I helped her with her homework, she tried to teach me Telugu, and we spent every second that we could together. She chased me around the property while I rode a bike, and I did the same thing to her. She made me sing to her, and I made her sing to me. She told me about her big siblings and what she wants to be when she grows up. We went to the zoo and the beach, and seeing the joy on her face at the littlest things made me remember why I wanted to be a social worker in the first place.

My time at HOINA was life changing, and I will never forget it. Being with kids like Harika made me feel right at home, and I am so thankful that I was able to be a role model in her life for the three short weeks I spent with her. This experience made me realize that I really do want to be a social worker.

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Attached at the Hip

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Having the opportunity to advocate for a child and to help them reach their full potential is work that I am so passionate about, no matter how hard the emotional load may be. I will remember my time with Harika forever; the joy she has for life and the love she has for Jesus are things that I strive to achieve. My time at HOINA has taught me much more than I could have ever imagined, and I am so thankful for having met Harika and all of the kids at HOINA.



Eliza and Julie, this month's authors, dressed up in their saris.