



NEWS FROM

HOINA

HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

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Cross-Cultural Connections

By Tajah McCray

York College of Pennsylvania Student

Every day at HOINA had so many twists, turns and zigzags, I was grateful that I was able to keep up, because being tired was not an option. While overall the trip was an amazing experience, some of my favorite moments consisted of sports, board games, and opportunities where the children would teach me about their culture. I'll never forget the day that Naidu Brother and I played a board game called Dadi [see photo page 2]. Dadi is a visual game similar to tic-tac-toe but with a different structure. I had never played this game before, so I asked him if he could teach me. Naidu Brother agreed, and I would like to say that the amount of patience he displayed with me was impressive. He understood the game so well, but it took me at least 20 minutes to figure out how to play. I thought it was the funniest thing because I lost every single round. I'd make a move that I thought would be good, and then the next thing you know my game piece would get stolen. I laughed so much that day and was happy to see that Naidu was having fun, too.

Another memorable moment was playing both football [our soccer] with the brothers and volleyball with the sisters. I haven't played either for fun in years, but while I was playing with them I enjoyed myself and felt energized. Anytime one of the brothers would score a goal, we would all yell, "GOALLL!" and give a bunch of high-fives. During that time, I was even able to score a goal which was really difficult because all of the brothers are very talented and athletic. On more than



Beautiful girls, left to right: Jyothi, Tajah, Bharathi, Kota Veni and Niharika.

one occasion, I'd try to kick the ball and completely miss, but then a brother on my team would come in and save the day. Thank goodness for them because sometimes I really needed the help.

Playing volleyball with the girls was less intense but no less fun. During one of those play sessions, I was inspired when I met HOINA sister Esther Joy, who aspires to be a professional athlete. During my stay I met a lot of sisters who look forward to being nurses and teachers, and brothers who plan to join the military or become engineers. Hearing their goals motivated me. All the kids take their studies very seriously, and it was nice to see that the boys and girls each had study sessions together. Sometimes in college I get a little unmotivated about my classwork, but seeing all the

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HOINA kids work so diligently encouraged me.

Another memorable moment I shared was the first time I started to remember the sisters' and brothers' names and some of the Telugu language. I met Rupa, Abiya, Mounikas, Hema, Vinny, Sudya, Santos, Uday, Bagee, Grace, Hemanth, Immanuel, Kumari and so many more. Whenever I called the brothers or sisters by name, their faces would light up. Seeing them smile made me so happy. The same thing happened when I was learning Telugu. Some of the sisters wrote some short communication phrases for me to learn in Telugu such as thank you or *Dhanyavadhaminu*, How



Yerri Naidu enjoys playing Dadi with Tajah.

are you? or *Bagunava?* and I'm fine, *Bagunanu*. Learning the language and culture from the kids I believe helped me build stronger

connections with them. Each day at HOINA was filled with memorable moments, and I'm looking forward to returning in the future.

Dance: A Universal Language

By Natalie Wagner
York College of Pennsylvania
Student

Visiting HOINA this past January also happened to be my first time traveling outside of the United States. I brought with me few expectations of what the experience would be, but day after day on our trip, I was eager to see what HOINA and the kids had to offer. As the two and half weeks went by, the other students and I met so many new brothers and sisters, played new games and built friendships we will never forget. We knew it would become harder and harder to say goodbye to our new family the longer we were there.



HOINA Girls (left to right): Tejasri, Aswini, Monika, Pramila and Kavya with Gina Santilli & Natalie from York College of Pennsylvania.

Dance

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We anticipated a bittersweet ending to our trip on the last night, as we prepared for a special program. A few HOINA students learned dances they performed that night, and the other York College students and I learned a routine as well. The night prior to the program, we spent a few hours learning the dance from some of the older HOINA girls. They were excited to teach us, just as we were excited to learn something new. Preethika, who was praised as one of the top dancers of the HOINA girls, was so patient with our group's lack of experience. We tried our best to learn it quickly, so we could go back to the guest house and practice.

Learning the dance was special for several reasons. The girls who taught us had been away for most of our visit, so it was a special time we were able to spend together, especially being our last few nights. Preethika had said she always loved dancing since she was little. The girls were telling us they sometimes have a teacher come to teach classical Indian dance at HOINA, and I immediately thought about all of my childhood dance classes. When I was younger, I was very shy and quiet, so I loved dancing because it meant that much more time I did not have to talk to anyone! I took classes of various forms (none of which were classical Indian dance) for over 15 years, so dancing became a huge part of my life. Preethika had said she loves the art form and tradition of dancing as well. I related so much to her in that moment, ignoring all differences between us and seeing the beauty of a shared passion.

Dance is an ancient art form, but the tradition of the Indian dance we learned had meaning and depth behind it. Vennila taught us the significance of our hand placements and what each move meant. We were no longer just dancing, but now communicating a respect for the tradition of it. I have never learned such a meaningful routine, in all my years of dancing. It meant even more knowing the girls took the time to teach us and help us practice.

Then came the time when we would perform our new routine for all the HOINA students. We had spent the afternoon getting dressed in our sarees, and hours later



Left to right: Bhagya Lakshmi, Sharmila, Natalie, Deekshitha and Geetika enjoy a happy moment together.

we were finally ready. We watched the other dances and performed ours last. It went about as well as you could imagine since we had learned it only less than a day before. Even so, we all had a lot of fun and shared a special moment with the kids since they got to see us embrace their culture even more. Afterwards, the young girls were so excited to tell us about how they loved our dance. With it being our last night, the routine we learned truly meant a lot to the kids, seeing how we stepped into their culture a tad more before our bittersweet departure. I am thankful for our sisters who helped us learn the routine, and for the sisterhood we shared through dance that night.

HOINA is a 501(c)3, tax-exempt organization with international headquarters located at: HOINA PO Box 87, Saint Charles, MO 63302-0087 U.S.A.

This newsletter is published to inform our readers of the work HOINA does among the handicapped and abandoned in India.

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HOINA
PO Box 636
Brownstown, PA 17508-0636 U.S.A.
717.355.9494 Toll-free: 877.99.HOINA (4.6462)
Email address: hoina@frontiernet.net Website: www.hoina.org

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National Cadet Corps

Hi! I am G. Kavya studying 8th grade. How are you? I am doing NCC. It means "National Cadet Corps." If I do NCC in my future I will be able to get a government job. I like to do NCC and I completed my first camp, so I am trying to do my second and third camps. I want to become an army commander in my future. I am praying for all of you daily.

Photo shows Kavya (left) and Esther Joy.



Keep Praying

For those of you who are wondering how our children are doing overseas during this pandemic, we want to assure you that our staff who are on campus have kept in contact with our students who had to go back to family members per the Indian government's requirements. As of this writing, all of our staff and children on campus and off are safe and healthy. Keep praying!