



NEWS FROM HOINA HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

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Runner Girl, My Girl

By Kiersten Scruggs, Student at York College of Pennsylvania

As a student of psychology at York College, I jumped at the opportunity to volunteer at HOINA. I knew this was something I had to do. Being at HOINA was so much more than what I could have ever imagined it to be. Mom, Papa Bruce, and the staff have created a beautiful family that I am now a part of and hope to return to soon.

What do you say about a person who changed your life? How do you verbalize all those speechless moments? As I reflect on my time spent at HOINA, one thing I will always carry with me is the love I received from one special girl by the name of R. Swathi. She showed me more love in those weeks at HOINA than I have ever received from someone I was still getting to know. Although we eventually got to know each other well, it still amazes me how easily the love I have for her came. When I met her the first day at HOINA, she instructed me to sit next to her during music class. The girl sitting to my left leaned over and whispered, "That's runner girl, sports girl." I found out later that Swathi runs track at her school, and she is amazing. That's the first thing we shared, running. Although an injury when I was 16 years old has sidelined my running career, I still have so much love for the sport. She told me that she made it to States and Nationals. Such an accomplishment, especially at her age, goes to show the talent and potential she has to go further and improve her skill. I encouraged her to keep at it and that I looked forward to seeing her at the Olympics one day.

As the days went on, we grew closer; and I learned more about her. She has a younger sister (as do I), her father passed away (as did mine), she is extremely



Kiersten and Swathi

ticklish (like me) and she has the most contagious smile and laughter. It didn't take long for me to realize how special she was, but I didn't realize just how much she would impact my life.

Runner Girl

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I couldn't tell you one simple thing she did that changed me, but I can tell you I am not the same person I was before going to India. I know that's because of her. I know she let her guard down around me because she let me touch and fawn over her long, beautiful hair. One day I caught her having someone take a picture of her hair while it was unbraided (for me). I almost cried. She disliked her long hair. Anytime someone would try to touch her hair, she would move out of their reach. When she got a compliment, she'd reach up to cover her hair and would say, "No." I told her all the time anyway how much I loved her hair. Taking a picture of her hair without my asking shows her thoughtfulness and loving nature.

Swathi is one of those people whom you never see down. No matter the circumstances, she walks around with a smile that could make the devil grin. One Sunday, Swathi's sister came to visit as this is the day reserved for family visits at HOINA. She told me how excited she was to see her sister, because it had been months since she had last seen her. When I met her, I noticed that her sister also carried the same spirit as her big sister Swathi. Later on that evening I noticed that Swathi was not the same cheerful girl that I had come to know. Concerned, I pulled her outside so we could chat; she informed me that her mother (who also visited) scolded her earlier for crying like a small child as she said her goodbyes to her sister. I couldn't understand how or why a parent would scold their child for expressing emotion. I wanted Swathi to know that there's no reason to feel guilt or shame for crying. I decided to share a story with her. I shared the story of my father's unexpected death. At 14 years old I found myself fatherless and crying every day, and that six years later—I still cry. She encouraged me to smile and to laugh when I felt like I was about to cry. I told her you can laugh and smile through the tears. In that moment I knew saying goodbye to her was going to be hard.

The last few days at HOINA were some of the best days. The boys and girls were on holiday from school so it was nonstop fun. During these days, Swathi and I took walks and talked. Hand-in-hand we shared our aspirations: I aspire to be a counselor helping young children and teens; she aspires to be a police officer. Among other things she inquired about my family. At one point, she even took my phone and ran away. Not until I left HOINA did I discover the videos she had recorded for me that I will never erase.

The morning that we left, I cried and cried. I wasn't ready to say goodbye to my *chaile* (little sister). I had fostered a relationship with her that I don't have with my own sister, and it scared me to know this could be the last time I saw her. As I walked onto the bus, I got a seat next to the window. I pulled the window back and leaned out of the bus. Swathi came running to me as she did every day for the last 14 days. As I leaned out the window I grabbed both of her hands, looking at her, with both of us crying; and she said to me, "Akka, don't cry. Be happy." I didn't want to be happy; I was leaving my family behind, leaving her behind. For her sake I tried to pull myself together and accomplish something she had been teaching me. I raised my right eyebrow—again and again—until she noticed and squealed with glee "YOU DID IT!" We were laughing. We were crying. We were smiling.



Four of our HOINA girls share a smile. L to R: K. Bhaga Lakshmi (wearing her wig and prosthetic ears. You may remember her from our Sept. 2013 issue), S. Pavithra, K. Jansi, and B. Bharathi.

HOINA Tigers

By Darlene Large, HOINA President



Pictured here is just a portion of the attendees of HOINA's first alumni function. The HOINA graduates who spent the night gathered for a group photo the following morning. Everyone was having so much fun reconnecting, we forgot to take a photo of the entire group on the first day!

Two years ago, I spoke to one of our graduates about starting an alumni association from our 4000 plus graduates. We had a lively discussion, and later, Sundar Rao, another alum working in film and T.V. production named our alumni the HOINA TIGERS. Hanumantharao, another alum said he would collect names and addresses and call them to a reunion in 2014.

HOINA hosted our first event on February 23. After some searching, the former graduates he was able to locate met with present HOINA students, who performed on our stage. Some grads stayed overnight and visited with their former sisters and brothers of HOINA the

following day. We plan to make this gathering an annual meeting. Our purpose was to involve our graduates in raising funds for scholarships for future HOINA students. This recent meeting saw Dr. N. Krishna as our Master of Ceremonies. We built a memory to last a lifetime. As a former HOINA student and a recent PhD. in microbiology, who teaches in a university in Guntur, he was a natural to lead us that day. Thanks to all of you who have helped our HOINA students grow into successful and productive lives. As they told us their stories, the men and women both shed tears of gratitude. God has been good to us, and we hope He will use every HOINA life to praise His name.

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Welcoming Two Brothers to the Teenage Years!



A. Sai

You wouldn't know it by their smiles, but Allumallu Sai and Allumallu Ravi are orphans. Their parents were married in 1995. Unfortunately, their father worked as a laborer in a stone quarry, but he was an alcoholic and died in May 2011. Their mother tried to work to care for her two boys, but she became ill. After she died in June 2013, a relative approached HOINA about caring for the boys. Thankfully, Sai and Ravi have a houseful of HOINA brothers now, so it is not just the two of them alone in the world.

We would love to challenge someone out there to take on sponsorship of either of these boys for just \$30/month. Your commitment will make a "forever" difference in the life of a HOINA child. (Check out page 3 of this issue!)



A. Ravi