



# NEWS FROM HOINA HOMES OF THE INDIAN NATION

PO Box 87, St. Charles, Missouri 63302 • [www.hoina.org](http://www.hoina.org) • March 2014

## My Sisters Halfway Around the World

By *Ebony Mason, Student at York College of Pennsylvania*

Making the decision to travel to India over my winter break from college was not a difficult one. I knew that it would mean spending the majority of our time at HOINA, and I have always enjoyed spending time with children. I thought that I could be of some help, but in reality the children taught me so much.

I do not think visitors can mentally prepare for all they will see and experience in India or at HOINA. The children, especially, are so warm, welcoming, and happy that it exceeded all of my expectations of visiting an “orphanage” in southern India. These children have been through so much yet are able to enjoy every day. They certainly made my days bright in the time that I spent there. I noticed that certain girls automatically gravitated toward each York student and would seek us out each day. We bonded like a little family. During our short time with them I felt as though we were truly their big sisters. Lahari, Sandya, Nikitha, Janaki, Mounika, and Pavithra were just a few of the children whom I remember always greeted me with a hug and smile each time I saw them. I looked forward to prayer, playtime, and study time every single day because of the children. Every morning we were greeted dozens of times with, “Good morning, sister” or “Good morning, Akka” (which means *sister* in Telugu); and every night we received hugs and well wishes.



Ebony and her new HOINA “sisters” take some time from playing to pose for a photo.

While I have so many wonderful memories from HOINA, one in particular always makes me smile. The children were on holiday from school, and we York students thought this would be a good day to do crafts with them. Since we still had a bit of painting and sanding

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# My Sisters

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work to do on the entrance gates to the girl's home, a few of us continued while everyone else instructed craft time. I was outside sanding my last fence when, suddenly, I saw two little girls running towards me, wearing the biggest smiles across their faces. I immediately recognized Lahari and Sandya. They were running back and forth up the driveway to the girls' home with their newly-made pinwheels in hand and butterfly clips in their hair, watching the spinning pinwheels as they ran.

Shortly thereafter, Lahari, Sandya, a few other girls, and I went over to the playground, where they climbed on top of the turtle mosaic sculpture with their pinwheels raised high hoping to find some wind to spin their pinwheels. They giggled and finally said, "Sister, we sing for you." They climbed down from the turtle and sang "Sunday School Ki Veldam," which is a Telugu song about getting ready to go to Sunday school. They taught me the song, what it meant, and the dance that accompanied it. I tried it and got some of the words and the dance moves wrong the first few times, but they were so encouraging. It wasn't too long before I could sing the whole song to them, which they found riotous. Then we all sang together, and they even incorporated their pinwheels into the dance.



Left to right: Sandya, Lahari and Kavya showing off their pinwheels.

Now that I am back at school I think of the experience, the fun I had, and everything I learned. I think about all the kids I interacted with and cherish my many Telugu lessons. I appreciate everything that the staff and children did to make us feel comfortable. I even miss being asked, "What's my name?" as nearly all of the children wanted to see if we remembered them. At first it was hard to remember everyone's names, but just seeing the joy on their faces when you called them by their name was motivation enough to remember it.

I tearfully left HOINA with my hands full of goodbye notes and letters. It was really sad, and I remember Nikitha saying, "Do not forget about HOINA." I smiled and promised that I never would. How could I ever forget my little sisters?

## Learning to Appreciate the Clouds

*By Caitlin Carmody, Senior at York College of Pennsylvania*

I have been told time and time again that the only things that truly matter in this world are relationships. Money, fortune, cars, and clothes can't be taken with you when you die, but meaningful relationships between people live on forever. Relationships can change a person's heart and help develop who they become. Stories of amazing people who leave tremendous impacts on others get passed through the generations to impact more people lifetimes away. My time at HOINA made me realize that this proverb is true. Relationships have the power to captivate you, shape you, and change you.

One such relationship that sticks out for me was the one that developed with a 13-year-old boy named Sekhar. I can't say why or how Sekhar latched onto me

so quickly, but I can say that I am blessed that he did. We met during study time on one of the first nights and were practically inseparable the rest of my time at HOINA. We had much in common (both being loud, ruckus-causing, sports-loving kids). However, it was Sekhar's differences that really made him stand out to me. I have never met someone with a heart that is so genuinely caring and pure. Despite his confident exterior, Sekhar is never too cool to make sure those around him know they're loved. If someone wanted to play a game that had already started, he excitedly included them. If someone was feeling down, Sekhar would go out of his way to cheer them up. Some of my personal moments like that with him were the moments that stuck with me.

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# Appreciate the Clouds

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I have blonde hair (which in India was very popular with the kids), so one day some of the HOINA children wanted to play with my hair. When they did, they were surprised because I have many benign tumors (just masses of cells, really) on my head. As soon as the kids touched them, they were rightfully disgusted. Despite my explaining that they weren't harmful and I was fine, the kids were still visibly disturbed. I'm normally not bothered by my strange head, but at this point I felt as if I were becoming a sideshow. Since it was inhibiting play time with the kids, I started to feel self-conscious. Sekhar was still staring at me with a look like he was upset, like he was scared for me. I told him I would be fine and apologized for being gross; but he stopped me and said, "No, Sister." That is all he said, but he kept repeating it adamantly so I would know not to be ashamed. He squeezed my hand and wouldn't take his eyes off of mine until I agreed that I was not defective. He didn't care about the other children around or what was on my head. Nothing else mattered to him except for my happiness in that moment. That moment changed my heart. A 13-year-old boy who barely knew me couldn't move on with his day until he was certain that I was comforted, happy, and secure. I was, and still am, in shock about how much he cared for an almost-total stranger. The amount of love he gave me in those few short minutes was more than I've gotten from a number of people I've known for years. His degrees of selflessness and compassion boggle my mind. He showed me what I am lacking in life and who I want to strive to be.

As my time drew to an end in my utopia of love that is HOINA, I became very sad. One of my fears is being forgotten; being so unmemorable that people forget you when you're gone. For me, that means I didn't do what I intended by positively impacting their lives. I was crying on my last night there as I said my goodbyes. Some of the boys told me I was like the sky and they were the stars, they would always be with me. This sentiment was beautiful already but Sekhar had to add to it to show just how much he cared. He told me that he wasn't a star, but a cloud because when the storms come the stars disappear but the clouds will



Left to right: Ganesh (Sekhar's younger brother), Sekhar, and Caitlin

never leave. He followed this by saying that there was no need for me to be sad, because I would be in his heart forever and he in mine so we would always be together. He had so much confidence in his words that he made me believe them, too. My little brother taught me so much about strength, love, compassion, caring, and values. Though only 13, he is my role model. Having Sekhar refer to me as his sister is such an honor, but the highest honor of all is having the most amazing little brother. HOINA is doing a fabulous job at raising such a high caliber of men and women. Never have I met children (or adults for that matter) who are more respectful, compassionate, intelligent, and honorable than the HOINA kids. They have all taught me the most meaningful lessons of my college career. I can't wait to go back and continue to learn from the best and brightest that this world has to offer.

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March 2014

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## Tax Day Birthday Baby

Botcha Jhansi Rani's parents were married in 1999. Her father worked as a house servant for a few years, then got a job in a liquor store. He became an alcoholic, contracted HIV, and died in August 2008. His wife became infected and died in May 2013. An aunt took the children but was unable to care for them, so a local policeman recommended HOINA. She approached HOINA and asked us to care for Jhansi Rani and her brother Raju.

Jhansi Rani will be 12 years old on April 15. She has not had a sponsor since her arrival with us last summer. Wouldn't you love to send her a birthday card telling her that you are supporting her? The children love getting pictures and letters from their sponsors. If you would like to be that person, please complete the coupon above and send it with your first monthly gift of \$30 to our office in Pennsylvania.

Thank you for giving a child hope.

