



Altrusa International Foundation of Longview-Kelso

RJM (Emma) comes to America, thanks to you



From Peggy

Thanks again to each of you who donated to help one of the orphans from a Jiangxi orphanage, come to the US this year as a high school exchange student. This will be a life-changing experience for her; hopefully some of the skills she picks up while here (especially learning English well) will help to compensate for the disadvantages she faces in China as an orphan. Here in the US she has chosen the English name of Emma, and I've asked her, and her host mother, Marty, to write a letter about her year so far.

I'm also grateful to Forte International Exchange Association for making this year possible for RJM. They waived all of their usual fees, and allowed her to come even though she didn't get the minimum score on the English proficiency test that they require. The head of Forte is himself from Nanchang, so has a special interest in students from Jiangxi, and is especially interested in helping the orphans. This is the first year one of our orphans was a strong enough student to participate and also brave enough to come. I hope there will be

more in the future. But in the meantime, if you would like to host a high school from Jiangxi province (not an orphan) for the upcoming school year, please email me at peggy@gurrad.com.

From Emma

I am happy to tell you my year here. At first it was hard to make sense of the what was going on in school. I made some friends a little bit but wasn't able to do much with them.

I have a great time with my host family. I did lots of stuff that I really wanted to do when I was little, like go down the big slide and climbing. And the girls I met who are adopted from China are really nice to me.

Maybe you know I was almost adopted internationally. But because I cared so much about my foster mom and I know how much she did for me, I wouldn't agree to be adopted. My foster mom took care of me even though a lot of people told her it was stupid to take care of a child that wasn't her own. And if I left my mom they would think that I am a person who does not know how to be thankful and they will think all the things my mom did for me did not count anymore. And at that time I was just 13 and I did not know how dark my social life would be later in China. In people's mind I am always a kid who does not have parents. For example if I want to get married to someone his parents will not agree with that unless maybe if I am strong and successful.

And that's the reason why I want to try to stay here (in the United States) for more than this one year of high school. I want to be able to choose to change my life and not always be looked at as not as good because I'm an orphan. Another reason is because of my dream, which is to be a doctor and find a way to help people who have cancer.

I think what makes me independent is my childhood life since I did have not many friends to talk with and play with.



Emma and Vivi: the chance to play.

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And others often made comments to me about being the person who doesn't have real parents. One time I cried and told my foster mom but I realized it does not help at all and instead makes my mom feel bad so after that I never told my mom when that happened more times. I think

having a hard childhood helped me grow and also at that time I decided I have to study better than those children and I did it even though I am not the best.

I think I will recommend other kids like me and my friends come to the US as an exchange student. Because this is a great learning experience in our life. And it could make our life more wonderful. I think that when I go home I will act more like a 17-year-old and think about others first when I do something.

Thanks to all the people who helped me to come to the US and learn to be more grown up. Thank you so much.
Emma

From Marty, host mom

Nearly 6 months ago, my daughter ViVi (adopted at 27 months from Chengdu, Sichuan), our nanny (who is a big contributor to our single mom family), and our former au pair (also from China, but now married and living in San Jose) and I went to SFO to meet Emma. I found Emma right away before we even managed to get our "Nihao Emma" signs in place. Communication on that very first day was helped so much by Clover (our former au pair) who chatted away with Emma in Mandarin. Emma's English has progressed immensely and I'm absolutely positive this will be a very big benefit to Emma going forward.

As I think about the other benefits to Emma from this year, it is easy to see they are great. And as much as I wanted to host Emma for my daughter's experience and deepening her connections with China, I realize that Emma is now so much a part of our family that perhaps the benefits have been lopsided in our favor! We love her, and even when Emma returns to China she will remain a part of our family forever.

Emma's life has gone from 6 ½ days a week at school (with a very heavy course load) to a typical American teenager's experience. At high school, she has had the opportunity to take music (guitar) and art (ceramics). She has learned to swim – her progress is amazing! After 4 weeks of playing indoor soccer, we saw Emma score her first ever goal and two weeks later she made the JV soccer team at her host high school. When we bought Emma her own soccer cleats, she said the cleats are on the list of things she will definitely take back to China – as a treasured memory. Oh yes, Emma also has her own skateboard – her Christmas wish – and as with most things she mastered it almost immediately.

I've had a chance to learn more about the social welfare system in China. Emma and I have also exchanged thoughts on everything from American concepts of health and hygiene, to dress code for homecoming dances, to texting standards with boys, to how aggressive to play soccer. We've explored the ideas of culture in China and how that differs in many respects from that of the US.

I lived outside the US for 8 years prior to adopting my daughter and I know that experience changed me (in a positive sense) forever. I believe the same will be true of Emma when she returns to China. With your support of Emma's trip, you have given an amazing young woman a very great gift of understanding life outside of the world she knew. Before your support and her year here, Emma had never been on an airplane, had never been to the beach, had never played the guitar, and never had the opportunity to create art. You have enriched Emma's life and in the process, you have enriched my family's life as well. Thank you so much.



Emma and Marty: new experiences!

From Peggy

We do still have some expenses we need to cover for Emma. We need to purchase her plane ticket home, and she would like to go on a trip with other exchange students to see New York and Washington D.C., which would be a great experience for her. The host family she is living with is in California. If you'd like to contribute towards these and other expenses for her you can use the blue "Donate Now" button at www.altrusa.info or email me at peggy@gurrad.com.