

# Exchange student thriving in year from home

By JOHNNY HO  
Guest Columnist

**Y**u Li Ho is my name in mandarin, but I almost forgot it, no one has called me that for many months. Everyone in Tell city calls me Johnny Ho. I am an exchange student from Taipei, Taiwan.

I never thought I could live far away from my parents for 10 months; I was scared to come to the United States alone. My mom encouraged me to come; she said it would be a good opportunity to do something special in my life. I live with the Sandage family; Scot, Gina, Spencer, Jordy and Hunter. They have helped me experience American life.

When I was in Taiwan and knew I was coming to America, I was worried most about school life. I remember my first day at school, I went with Hunter to all of his classes. Everyone was interested about me and tried to talk to me, but I could not understand most of what they said to me. I was nervous and I couldn't have any conversations. When I got my own class schedule, I had to go to my classrooms by myself. I did get lost several times, and was almost late to my classes. It is a lot different from Taiwan.

It has been seven months since I came to the United States and my English is getting much better. I always try to talk to people, but it is not always easy. Sometimes I am quiet, feeling lonely and missing home. I thought I should be able to speak English like an American and it reminds me that I should be working much harder than what I am doing.

At first, in my Earth Science class, I was struggling to understand the text book. I was



Johnny's first real Christmas tree at Harper's Tree Farm near German Ridge. With him are his host family, Spencer, Hunter, Gina and Scot Sandage. Jordy Sandage was absent from the photo.

overwhelmed by all the new things I had to do. So I was making an F in the class. Scot encouraged me to try harder and told me how to study in this class. Now I am doing much better. In fact, I am now making all A's and B's.

Before I came here, I was dreaming about joining the high-school football team, but it was too late to join the team, and then I joined the cross country team. I had never ran long distance in Taiwan. On the first day of practice, when Coach Hollinden ran with me about two miles, I felt I was going to

throw up but coach didn't even get sweaty. I almost quit when I heard coach said they ran 6 miles every day. I did not quit though and continued running with the team. In my first meet, I ran the wrong way and I could not finish the race, but my place was 143 of 144. In my fourth meet, I was able to beat some of the other runners. I like all the members of the team. They cheered me on when I was tired and they were always patient to listen to my broken English. They were the best friends I made in the very beginning of my life in America. We won the

PAC championship and I was part of the team.

In the winter, I joined the swim team with Hunter. I was worried about my diving at first, I didn't know how to do it at all and my goggles fell off all the time when I was diving. Soon I realized it was not a big problem. One time, we were practicing diving and swimming, I stopped swimming after diving because my goggles fell off again. Coach yelled at me loudly, "get out the pool."

That was the first time to be yelled at in Tell City. I was so scared and embarrassed, and I will never forget the lesson Coach Anderson taught me, "never stop when your goggles fall off!" He taught me how to be a good swimmer and I am grateful.

After Christmas vacation, the practices got much harder and that made me be much stronger. I won the 100 butterfly at the home game, which was the first time coach asked me to swim the 100 butterfly. I was so nervous before it started. I beat the second swimmer by .04 second. I could not believe I got first place. We only had seven people on our team, but we won that meet.

I am involved in a lot of activities now including track, bowling, archery, math bowl and spring soccer. I had never done most of them in Taiwan, but in spite of my inexperience, I always try my best. My English is much better now; I can understand most of what people say. I have experienced many things here in Tell City, and I know how to solve problems by myself. Before I came to live in the United States, I depended on my family, but now I have learned to solve challenges by myself and ask for help

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as necessary. I have three more months of American life. I will treasure the time that I have had with everyone here. To be an exchange student is harder than I thought, but it has proven to be a special part of my life.

I wish to thank everyone in Tell City that has been so kind to me during my stay in the United States. I have really enjoyed attending TCJSHS and I will always remember the kindness everyone extended me, especially the new friends I made, including my cross country, track and swim teammates. My teammates are my best friends forever. If I have the chance, I will return to visit Tell City next year.

*Johnny's exchange program was facilitated by the Center for Cultural Interchange. For more information on hosting a local family call Jenny Brunner at 547-4664 or 608-0204.*



Johnny swimming for Tell City High School. Photo at right, Johnny with Hunter and Spencer Sandage just after the Taiwanese youth landed at Evansville Regional Airport.

