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## Two Stillwater students hail from China

Foreign exchange at Stillwater Christian School has reached the fourth grade level with 9-year-old Hao “Lily” Quan.



“Lily is the youngest exchange student that this school has had,” said her host mother, Emily Zemacke. “She was 8 when she came and that is the biggest surprise for people.”

Stillwater also has two exchange students who have attended all four years of high school. One of those students is senior 17-year-old Jiayun “Joy” Hao (the other is Woo Jin Kang from South Korea).

Hao and Quan are both from the Chinese city of Shenyang in the Liaoning Province.

“My parents know her aunt and uncle,” Hao said.

While Hao is in her fourth year, this is Quan’s first trip to America.

“I came here at 2014, September 15,” Quan said.

Quan and Hao met at Stillwater on March 6 to talk about their experiences. Zemacke and her daughters, 10-year-old Macy and 8-year-old Isabel, joined the conversation.

While the two students have separate host families and attend school in different buildings, Stillwater Admissions Director Renee Wynne said accepting an exchange student as young as Quan was possible because of Hao. During the application process, Hao served as the translator between the school and Quan’s family.

“I don’t think anything would happen like this without Joy,” Wynne said. “Lily’s father stayed here a week and Joy was the translator between teachers and the father.”

Hao, who lives with host family Mike and Julie Thompson and their two children, said she was happy to have helped. Four years ago, Hao filled out her own application to Stillwater. Hao chose to attend the Kalispell high school because she had family living in Montana.

Hao didn’t think it was that uncommon to study abroad all four years.

“If you want to start it, you want to finish it,” Hao said.

After so many years, Hao’s classmates don’t think of her as an exchange student any more.

She is a National Honor Society member, participates in choir, teaches piano lessons and will graduate with a special music diploma. After graduation she plans to stay in America to attend college, majoring in chemistry while continuing music studies. Eventually, Hao envisions becoming a surgeon.

"I've always wanted to be a doctor," Hao said. "Growing up, most of my parents' friends are doctors, so I've been in a doctor's circle. It just fascinates me. They know so much about the body."

While American high schools emphasize a well-rounded liberal arts education, Hao said Chinese students are specializing in certain subjects by high school. Chinese education also is more intensive starting at the elementary level, according to Hao. Hao said American high schools offer more choices and flexibility.

"I can make my life super hard by taking a bunch of challenging courses, doing music and sports and activities, or I can just lay back," Hao said. "It's up to the individual how hard you want your life to be and China is more routine and standards for everybody."

Quan, who is a whiz at math and is interested in science, keeps in touch with her parents through video chat, regularly updating them on her academic progress — showing them test and homework scores — and teaching them what she learns.

"I want to be a teacher, or a science person, or probably a story writer because I'm working on two stories right now. One is about just my life, and another one is about a groundhog's adventure," Quan said.

"Both very intriguing," Zemacke added.

During the conversation, the lively fourth-grader showed no trace of the shyness she had when she came off the plane, Zemacke said. Quan spoke with unabashed confidence — a familiar trait in young children — about her American experiences. In the food department, she has gained a taste for cheeseburgers from Norm's News and relishes rotisserie chicken. Quan gave the Zemackes a taste of China by cooking a basic Chinese breakfast of scrambled eggs with sautéed green onions and tomatoes.

Quan also talked about having fun — playing with her host sisters and listening to Disney music. At the end of the school year, the Zemackes will take her to Disney World, Quan said, her shoulders hunched up with excitement.

Quan was the first student the Zemackes have taken in, primarily because of her age.

"Lily and Macy are in the same class," Zemacke said. "She has just fit into our family perfectly. They like the same things, they do the same things."

Zemacke said she felt the biggest risk of taking in a young exchange student was being able to communicate, which wasn't a problem because Quan started learning English at 3. English proficiency is one of the hopes Quan's parents have for her.

"Her English has improved so much," Hao said.

Yet, slang undoubtedly creeps in with exposure to American culture.

"She'll say things now like, 'What's up, Mom,'" Zemacke said.

What really got a rise out of her host mother during the conversation was when Quan answered the question about what she will miss about her stay.

“What I’ll miss the most when I’m not here,” Quan paused, “is probably Minecraft!”

Her answer was met with giggles and laughter.

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