

Overcoming the Odds

Contributed by Tom McGregor
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Liu Sen has long struggled with adversity. The 14-year-old grew up in impoverished conditions and has lived with his grandmother, Li Genzhen, 83, ever since his parents died of AIDS when he was very young. Liu has been diagnosed with HIV as well.

Home is a primitive shack that looks like a cave in the remote village of Anhe in Baita town, a few kilometers away from Xingtai city, Hebei province. There is no running water and a light bulb is his only access to modern-day technology. He must cultivate a vegetable garden for food.

It would seem that any young boy facing such dire straits would lose hope, but Liu remains optimistic. He believes that "studying hard" can make a better life for himself and his grandmother. He holds a special love for math, a subject he studies at Gaozhuang Middle School.

Liu dreams of going on to study at a university where he can learn more about trigonometry, calculus and the algorithms of life. However, there are still many obstacles to overcome.

His grandmother cannot pay for a tutor to help him prepare for the college entrance examinations. He must also spend time looking after his elderly and sick grandmother. But at least, he won't be distracted from watching television, since their ancient set broke down a few years ago. He does not have a cell phone, computer or Internet access.

Photo of Liu Sen was taken by Zhou Ya wei

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