



**Determined to Live Life
to the Fullest**

HERO AWARD WINNER

The Hao Family

DETERMINATION

Very early in life, Amy Hao experienced a number of defining moments. Born prematurely, she stopped breathing when she was just 12 days old and suffered brain damage. She spent her first 56 days in a hospital incubator. At 7 months, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. With this condition, she has very limited use of her hands and legs.

But to her parents and to those who know her, Amy isn't defined or limited by those early experiences. Instead, the Hao family has been incredibly determined to do everything possible to help Amy live her life fully and independently.

It hasn't been easy. Making Amy's dream of an education come true required the family to move from China to California when Amy was 10 years old. The family didn't know anyone in America and didn't speak English. Amy's parents, Harry and Anna, couldn't get jobs like they had in China. They had no health insurance.

But step by step, this family made it happen. Amy is now 23 and an IBO. She's cheerful, thriving and ambitious, studying for a master's degree in education. For their ability to continually overcome obstacles and persevere, Amy and her parents are being honored with the Amway Family Hero Award for Determination.

TINY BUT TOUGH

Harry and Anna Hao were married for only a year when Amy was born in 1995. She was tiny – only 3.5 pounds – and had a full head of dark, curly hair. At first, Harry and Anna didn't know how to cope with Amy's cerebral palsy. "When we got the diagnosis, we went home and could do nothing but cry," Anna said. "We were totally at a loss as to what to do next."

Although Amy couldn't use her arms and legs, she was a happy, babbling baby. The next steps became clear to her parents. "We brought her into this world and she is our child," Harry said. "We need to do everything possible to find a treatment for her. We want her to grow up and lead a normal life."

Over the next several years, Anna and Harry couldn't begin to count the number of doctors, hospitals and clinics they visited all over China. "I did at some point want to throw in the towel," Harry said. "But as I watched Amy grow, I saw her expressions and the intelligent look in her eyes. Her smiles provided constant encouragement for me to go on." >

"My approach is never give up, no matter what happens in life."

AMY HAO



Amy chats with Qingyun Wu, a professor at Cal State-LA.

Anna and Harry did their best to homeschool Amy, teaching her the Chinese language and math. They had a caregiver to help at home. When Amy was 7, the caregiver was no longer available, so Anna took Amy with her to her job as an auto inspector. All the while, Amy was her chipper self. “She was happy,” Anna said. “She smiled a lot and had a sunny personality.”

On more than one occasion, Amy told her parents she really wanted to go to school. But in China, there were no good options for her. There are schools for the blind, the deaf and those with intellectual disability, “but Amy’s condition doesn’t fit the existing education system,” Anna said. “She is intelligent and she can articulate what she wants. She just cannot physically perform those functions herself.”

6,500 MILES AWAY

Harry and Anna felt Amy’s best chance for an education and good medical care was in the United States. The Haos decided to move to America, even though they had no connections and didn’t speak the language. After arriving in California, they connected with members of a church community, who helped them settle into a Los Angeles neighborhood. The family also found the Byron E. Thompson Elementary School, where they hoped to enroll 10-year-old Amy.

With no formal schooling in China, Amy needed to be evaluated and prepared to join a classroom.

The family worked with an inclusion specialist at the school, Tracy Martin, who helped her transition into the fifth grade. Tracy noticed right away that Amy was eager to learn and full of potential. “In one year she had excellent conversational English, and in two years, excellent reading skills,” Tracy said. “Amy is extremely bright, and she’s an extraordinarily fast learner.”

Amy’s dream of attending school was finally coming true. It was hard in the beginning while she was learning English, but Amy was motivated. She caught up with her U.S. classmates and learned to use assistive technology to complete her schoolwork. She uses her head to control her electric wheelchair and her chin to control her tablet computer. She can type slowly with one index finger.



To make it possible for Amy to earn her master’s degree, Anna attends classes with Amy and offers assistance.



Amy and her parents reminisce while looking at photos from when they lived in China.

Tasks that are routine for most students, such as completing a homework assignment or writing a paper, still require extra time and concentration for Amy, who always had the drive and ambition to take it on. “How much Amy accomplished was amazing. Remarkable,” Tracy said. “She always wanted to go above and beyond.”

While Harry worked, Anna helped Amy with her schooling, turning pages for her and caring for her so Amy could study and learn. After elementary school, there was no stopping Amy. She graduated from Gabrielino High School in San Gabriel, California, in 2014. She graduated from California State University-Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2018.

These days Amy can be found zipping around the Cal State-LA campus in her electric wheelchair, studying for a master’s degree in education and earning her teaching credentials. Anna goes to campus with Amy, attending every class with her and offering assistance.

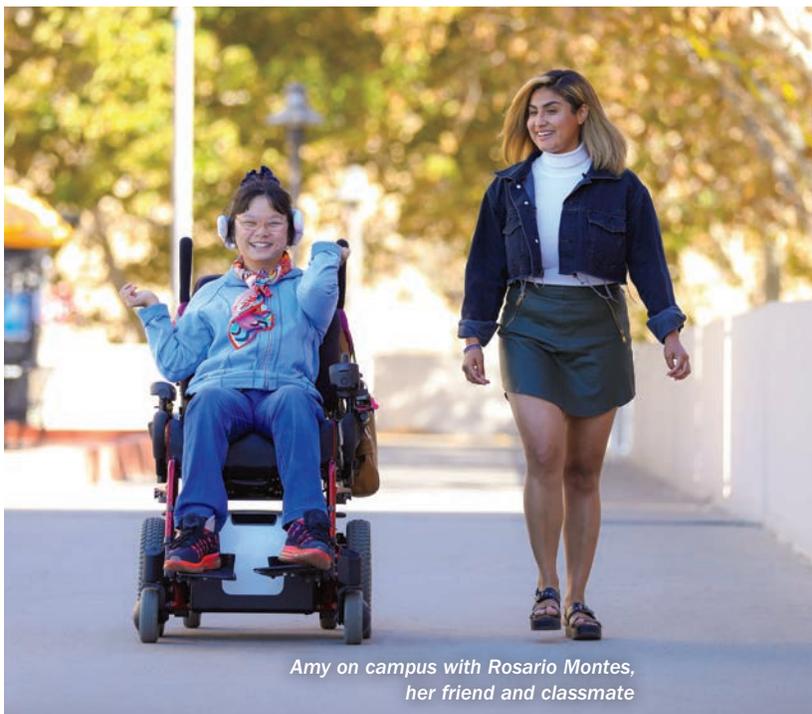
In the future, Amy would like to work with students with disabilities. She’s confident she can make a difference. “For me, being in a similar situation, I understand how the parents feel and how the child feels,” she said. “That’s my connection. Not every teacher understands what we are going through.”

Had her family stayed in China, Amy doesn’t believe she would have the same opportunities that she has in the U.S. “I couldn’t go to school, so I couldn’t support myself,” she said. “I would have no source of income. It would be so much different.”

Finding a way to attend school was critical, she said. “I know being educated was my only method to improve myself and prove to others that a disability cannot hinder my goals and dreams,” Amy said. “Education is the only way for me to do that.”

It’s her attitude in life – and having learned determination from her parents – that has helped Amy overcome so many obstacles. “My philosophy is everyone has ups and downs,” she said. “I know I have to work harder than other people. My abilities and opportunities are endless, as long as I try my best.”

Anna and Harry are both very proud of Amy, but don’t see themselves as special. “As a couple, we are doing what parents are supposed to



Amy on campus with Rosario Montes, her friend and classmate

do,” Harry said. “It’s our instinct as parents. We haven’t done anything extraordinary.”

But Amy knows what her parents have done is an extraordinary act of love. “They obviously sacrificed their life just for me to be educated so I can build a successful career,” Amy said. “I am very, very grateful for all they have done. Without them, I would not be where I am today. To me, they are the greatest parents in the world.” ■