

Melanie Bluhm, EurAupair Au Pair of the Year 2011 and IAPA Au Pair of the Year Finalist

Every year thousands of young people from all over the world embark on a special journey by becoming au pairs. Leaving behind the familiarity of their homeland for as long as one year, au pairs travel to distant countries, where they are welcomed into another culture as part of their host family.

To reward au pairs for the wonderful job they do caring for children, EurAupair has announced its 1st Annual EurAupair Au Pair of the Year in 2011.

Melanie was nominated by her host family, the Cameron family from Pennsylvania.



Melanie Bluhm with the three host children

I found myself saying more than once to friends and family, if EurAupair had an aupair of the year award, our au pair would surely be deserving of the honor. Thank you for this opportunity to share our wonderful experience with an extraordinary young woman: Melanie Bluhm.

We are the Cameron family from Wayne, PA with three young daughters, four-year-old twins Chloe and Sophia and two-year-old Hannah. Melanie joined our family in August 2009. Although she departed in September 2010, she has never left our hearts. She is the best advertisement conceivable for why a family should welcome an au pair into their home.

Melanie arrived a few weeks before my husband was hospitalized after being told he had suffered a stroke. She handled the situation with competence and a maturity beyond her years. She immediately took charge of the household and took care of all of us, not just the children. One of the things I love most about Melanie was I rarely had to ask her to do anything that she had not already thought of and accomplished on her own.

Melanie had many advantages coming into her au pair year. She had several years of childcare experience, studied early childhood development, and completed several internships with young children. Her experience had earned her a par experience status, and she exceeded our expectations. She made taking care of three children three and



Melanie Bluhm, EurAupair Au Pair of the Year 2011 with the three Cameron children

under look easy! Any parent of young children can attest that it's far from easy.

One of the more extraordinary things about Melanie was the deep interest she took in our children's welfare. Melanie helped us identify pre-ADHD behaviors in one of our daughters, and attended counseling sessions with us to work with behavior modification. Her attentiveness and ability to recognize this condition, not only helped us get our daughter the help she needs, but also helped us better understand her needs, dramatically improving our relationship.

We learned a lot about German culture, particularly East German culture from our time with Melanie. She brought us German Christmas decorations as host gifts, made weinerschntzel, taught our children German songs, and gave my husband an appreciation for World Cup Soccer.

Melanie's love and compassion reached beyond our immediate family, enriching my elderly mother's life. It was her idea to visit my mom weekly at her assisted living community with my youngest while

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About Us...

EurAupair Intercultural Child Care Programs is a non-profit, public benefit organization designated by the U.S. Department of State to conduct the Au Pair cultural exchange program under the Fulbright Hays Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 and is intended "to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges".

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Melanie Bluhm with the Cameron family

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Alexandra Goulay (France) Hosted by the Partridge Family from Seattle, WA

Every au pair accepts certain challenges when embarking on her year in a new country. She encounters a new culture with a new language, new food, and new traditions. In fact, it may be said she will wear many different hats during her year long journey in a new country. I am pleased to introduce you to my family's au pair for 2010, Alexandra Goulay. Alex has worn many hats during her year with our family, not only providing exemplary care for my two children, Joshua and Megan, but also acting as a new member of our family,



Alexandra Goulay (France) with Megan Partridge

a representative of France, and a student of American culture. Alex has truly excelled in wearing several hats over the last year, and I am grateful for the opportunity to tell you, and Alex, what a fantastic gift she has been to our family.

In addition to the numerous challenges faced by all au pairs, there are several circumstances unique to our family which Alex also accepted. Not long prior to engaging Alex, I became a single parent. This has resulted in Alex acting as one of only two adults in our home. More importantly, this meant more was also asked of Alex when we left our home together, and she rose to the

challenge in assisting me to care for Josh and Megan whether we were going to the grocery store or camping at the Oregon beach. In addition to being a single parent, I also have a demanding full-time job as a physician in a pediatric emergency department. This has meant Alex was also asked to exhibit the same flexibility in her life as I experience in my shifts, including days, afternoons, evenings, weekends, and holidays, and never the same schedule two weeks in a row. Alex has also shown great flexibility in caring for my eight year old son, Joshua. Joshua was born with Down syndrome, and although he is a healthy and active boy, he has developmental delays in all areas. Although Alex had no prior experience in caring for children with Down syndrome, she fully embraced this experience with an incredible willingness to mold her life to meet the needs of our family.

Alex not only strived to meet the needs of our family, but she also endeavored to integrate herself as a family member. She has shown incredible warmth, affection, and patience for both Josh and Megan. I would often return home from work to find Alex, Josh, and Megan cuddling together on the couch reading books, looking at pictures, or watching French cartoons. She has shared her artistic nature with Josh and Megan, encouraging them to color and draw, and creating art projects for them. As a result of Alex's year, Megan is now an avid painter! Alex has also consistently taken photographs of her time with the children, and I have the additional gift of a year of pictures of my children with her, which has helped bridge the gap of time when I cannot be home. Alex has also provided consistency in discipline and lifestyle for Josh and Megan, but has always remembered who is the parent in our home. Alex has dependably assisted around our home, almost always without being prompted. I have been intensely grateful to return home from a shift to find the dishes done, the children bathed, and no toys on the living room floor!

Alex also supported our family through a move into our first house, well and above what her contract required! Most of all, Alex has earned our trust and respect. She has shown excellent judgment in what is safe and appropriate for my children. There is no greater trust I can give someone than to trust her with my children, and I can without reservation say I completely trust Alex.

Not only has Alex integrated herself as a member of our family, she has done it while sharing with us her French culture. My children are now experienced consumers of crepes, French cakes, and quiche. Alex even made crepes for my extended family one evening while we were camping at the beach! Over the last year, Josh and Megan have learned common phrases, their ABCs, and their



Host children Joshua and Megan Partridge

numbers in French. Megan even sometimes has tantrums in French, saying, "Mama, j'ai dit no!!!" (Mama, I said no!!!). Josh and Meg both know Alex's extended family as well, and talk with them frequently on Skype, usually in French. It was with delight this summer I watched Josh and Megan view the opening of the World Cup while eating Nutella with Alex!!!

While sharing her French culture, Alex has also embraced the experience of being an au pair in the United States. She has shown a spirit of adventure in traveling throughout the Pacific Northwest and the US during her time off. She has made good use of her time and visited Portland, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, the Grand Canyon, New York City, Washington D.C., and Hawaii. She has also actively worked to improve her English, I have caught her with her workbooks even when she was not enrolled in formal classes, and she often comes to me to explain American idioms. It has been a delight to see her enthusiasm for

uniquely American experiences, including celebrating the 4th of July, searching for a Halloween costume for herself, and tasting her first Reese's peanut butter cup. She has been enthusiastic in trying new foods, and she often asked for the recipe after dinner so she can share chocolate chip cookies and chicken enchiladas when she arrives home. Alex has also worked to ease the transition for our family after she returns to France. She has been instrumental in helping us choose our new au pair, and has been a great resource in explaining to new candidates regarding the unique needs of my family. Not only have I seen Alex embrace the experience, I have also been delighted to see her embrace her independence and confidence over the last year. She has grown into a delightful woman.

Our year with Alex draws to a close, in fact in only three days we will say au revoir to her. She has not only provided the highest quality care for Josh and Megan, but she also exemplified the role of an au pair, and her country should be proud of her as their representative. I have seen this experience enrich not only her life, but also mine and those of my children and extended family. Josh and Megan will always know there is someone in France who loves them. I am looking forward to seeing all the wonderful things Alex will make of her life as she lays down this hat and takes up new ones!

EurAupair would like to thank the Partridge family for sharing this experience with us!



Host children Joshua and Megan Partridge



Alexandra Goulay (France) making funny faces with Joshua Partridge

An Amazing Au Pair Experience!

By Stacey Maule, Host Mother from Eagle, CO

This is a big week at our house. My younger daughter, Ali turned two on Saturday and my older daughter, Samantha, turns four on Friday. We had a combined party on the Sunday between the big days. One of the most special parts of the week of celebrations has been having all three of our au pairs with us for the meals, cake, and present events.

Bianca joined our family when Samantha was 6 months old. She quickly became part of our team for caring for Samantha, and keeping our household running. I do not have the space or time to list all of her wonderful qualities and all the amazing things she brought to our home and to Samantha's world. My favorite memory is the day she taught her to clap her hands. We were ecstatic when she decided to stay for the second year, especially because we had just found out that Samantha would be a big sister. Bianca was at the hospital within hours of Ali's birth with eager open arms. Knowing that Samantha's best buddy was there for her when we were consumed with the newborn was invaluable. We thought that was the best luck ever. Then Julia arrived. Magnanimous and outgoing, adventurous and fun,

Julia was a force we never imagined. I was so nervous about a new au pair. How could we be so fortunate twice, and yet we were. Julia and her family have become our family. It still amazes me how one person can transform so many. Laughter is my fondest memory of Julia's time with our girls. Loud and long and clear, it echoed through every corner of our world when they were together. Then came the dreaded time in June when we choose the next au pair. How could we be so successful again? Julia helped and in August Leonie arrived. Quiet, warm, and loving, Leonie has become the mainstay in our ever chaotic house. We were very nervous (again) as Ali had developed into a painfully shy little girl who did not deal well with new faces. We breathed a sigh of relief when she took to Leonie from the very first day. With a pre-schooler and a toddler and all the schedules, playdates, homework, and mess that comes with them, Leonie has it all under control. She makes grocery shopping as much of an adventure as a trip to the park and has exposed our girls to as much German as she can. At this point I hesitate to call them "our girls" unless by our I mean Jim, my husband, and me as

well as our three au pairs.

So - back to the birthday. All three au pairs were there! Bianca lives in our town, Julia came to visit on her term break, and Leonie lives with us. They are great friends and the best gift Samantha and Ali have ever received. Our gratitude for them is immeasurable. I think the photo says it all.

I hope you have the privilege to hear about many of the great experiences you have facilitated by helping families bring these amazing people into our lives. Thank you for the years of support!

EurAupair would like to send a big thank you to the Maule family for sharing this amazing story with us!



From left to right: Bianca Mattern with Samantha, Julia Spannagel with Ali, and Leonie Schwarz after the birthday party

I <3 NYC

By Méлина Delauney, Au Pair from France Hosted by the Dubois Family

"That city I have been dreaming for is actually much better in reality. I'm spending all my weeks in the calm suburbs, on the seaside of Westchester County, in NY State, taking care of the kids. On the weekends I can stay at a girlfriend's house in the upper west side, in the city. Lucky me!

New York is sooo amazing! The city has so much to offer. You can eat what you want, whenever you want, you have such great places, you meet people coming from all over the

world. What makes NY so special is this beautiful melting pot!!!! The whole world in one city!

There is always something to celebrate in NY, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving's parade, New York's marathon, Christmas, New year's eve in Time Square, St Patrick's day, Chinese new year's parade, gay pride, hot dog contest in Coney Island, fashion week, and you'll just have to walk down the subway to find some amazing concert. Yeah, NY's life is an unstoppable party.

And when you get tired of it, just go for some rest in central park!

As I first came here to start my au pair life, I started to visit the tourist places, but I rapidly headed to the real NY life. I love go walk around the village, to shop in Soho, and to chill on the green grass in central park. I learned how to love NY for what it really is: a charming city that never sleeps!

There is no other place in the world like NY! Once you come here, you never want to leave this place.

That's the secret of the big apple, you will fall in love with it!

I'm so thankful to EurAupair, for giving me the chance to live one Year in NY. This is the best thing that could happen to me! Like a first love, I will always remember the first feelings that came through me when I saw Time Square for the first time: WOW!!!"

Thank you to Méлина for sharing all this fun with all of us at the EurAupair Gazette.



A view of busy New York City, NY



Méлина and her friend Emmanuelle in Central Park

Stefanie Wiedeburg (Germany) Hosted by the Graham Family from Seattle, WA

In the United States we have an expression called “Trial by Fire”. If you were to look this up in the Graham Family dictionary you would simply find a picture of Stefanie Wiedeburg, still wearing the rucksack she brought over from Germany, but in each arm would be an infant twin boy and at her feet both a 4.5 year old girl and an almost 3 year old boy (probably trying to tackle her).

Steffi arrived in Seattle two months after our twins, Gus and Jack, were born. Our two older children, Charlotte and Hugh, were having a tough time sharing Mommy and we were all adjusting to the chaos of a large family. We were new to the Au Pair experience and a little apprehensive to have a stranger come live with us during what would probably be the most stressful time of our lives. Weighing the pros and cons we finally decided the benefits of finding the right person clearly outweighed the risks (Did I mention we would all be sharing one bathroom?).



Stefanie Wiedeburg (Germany) with host family twins Gus and Jack Graham

When we found Steffi’s profile online, she seemed too good to be true- a NICU nurse at a Children’s Hospital, 23 and independent, yet spirited (some may argue crazy) enough to come to Seattle and be our Au Pair. She was from Germany, which would strengthen our goal of raising the kids to be German bilingual (my parents were originally from Germany and Charlotte and Hugh were attending a German preschool nearby). After Steffi’s first week with us it was clear she was a rare gem and I was desperate to make her like us, like Seattle and want to stay for the year!

I often refer to Steffi as the “Super Au Pair” – a modern, family oriented superhero! Watching two babies with mild reflux, she has had more spit-up on her than any non-parent should ever have to deal with. She has had twice as much food spit at her as the boys learn to eat solid foods. She has been with us through potty training (and all the comical mishaps that go along with it), many a bruises, cuts and scrapes and a broken arm. She has been on vacation with us, traveling in planes with 4 small children and staying with our relatives for weeks at a time. She has gone from hearing “I WANT MOMMY” a thousand times over to getting hugs and kisses and “I love you, Steffi”. She is now a favorite friend to tackle. While our kids can be very stubborn (especially our five year old princess) she has worked her way into their hearts and has become a part of our family.

I was super impressed with Steffi and the way she has embraced Seattle from the start. By



Stefanie Wiedeburg (Germany) with two host family children, Charlotte and Hugh Graham

the end of her first week here she had contacted other Au Pairs in the area and had set up several coffee dates and had plans her first Saturday night! She has always been very self motivated and out-going, and makes friends easily. She has taken the kids on lots of adventures and seen more of Seattle than I probably have!

I think Steffi deserves to be awarded Au Pair of the Year because she embodies everything about the Au Pair program. She has brought her culture and language into our home and our kids are now speaking fluent German and singing German songs! For my husband and I she

has provided loving care for our children and has allowed us a little freedom to spend time together and maintain some kind of sanity in our day to day lives. Eight months ago I would have said this upcoming year was going to be complete chaos and daunting and it is because of Steffi that I can say we’ve had a fantastic year and we’ve been able to enjoy our time together as a family and watch our babies turn into little people, and had fun doing it!

Thank you Graham family for sharing your memories with us!



Stefanie with Charlotte, Hugh, Gus and Jack Graham

Continued from front page...

the other girls attended preschool. They would often go on outings to the grocery store or the local café. My mother remains eternally grateful for Melanie’s thoughtfulness to include her in outings with the children.

In addition to her competent care, consistent discipline and loving but firm approach, Melanie is very creative. She wrote two stories in the form of graphic novels about our family, illustrated with pictures. At her farewell party, she had the children put together a puppet show

set to Louis Armstrong’s Wonderful Word. Her great sense of humor made her a joy to be around. Now at university studying social work, she is on her way to a successful career working with children. We’re so glad she choose to help build her career as an exceptional caregiver and honorary member of our family.

A big thank you to the Cameron family for nominating Melanie, and congratulations to Melanie for winning EurAupair’s Au Pair of the Year 2011 title.



Four-year-old twins Chloe and Sophi, and two-year-old Hannah Cameron (center)