

Hosting an Au Pair – Views from a EurAuPair Family

By Kim Solem, EurAuPair Host Mom in Bellevue, WA

A few years ago, a rewarding new work opportunity came across my desk: an invitation to help build a new foundation focused on helping kids thrive in life through sports. It was perfect for me in every way, except one: it meant a big reduction in our family income.

My husband Jon and I sat down with our spreadsheets and carefully examined our expenses to see if we could find a way to live on less. After our mortgage, child care was our biggest budget line item. Because of my son Keenan's behavioral disabilities, down-the-street day care was not an option for us, and for years we had employed a highly skilled in-home nanny. As much as we loved her, I couldn't take this new career step unless we found a more affordable child care solution.

"I think it's time to try an au pair," Jon suggested. He had used them for child care for his two girls before he met me, with great success. "Keenan is maturing to the point that I think we could get by with someone with grit and common sense for about half our current cost."

"I'm not sure this house can handle another person living in it," I objected. "We're packed in tight." Jon thought for a moment. "We could have the little girls share a room, which would free up some space. They'd love to sleep in bunk beds. Besides, if we found a German au pair, she could expose the kids to a new culture and traditions, and the two of you could speak German when you don't want the kids to eavesdrop on your conversation."

"How will we find someone who can handle Keenan and be a good fit for our family by interviewing them across the world?" I asked. "It seems like such a long shot, and once they're here we're stuck with them." "You can actually get a replacement if it doesn't work, and the au pair organization helps you find a new one. Skype works great for interviews; let's just do a few and check it out."

We contacted the EurAuPair organization, and the process started with an in-home interview. Just as we were evaluating the program, they were also evaluating us to make sure we could provide a comfortable

home for an au pair. They were a US Department of State designated nonprofit intercultural exchange program, and were extremely organized: they held a family orientation meeting, explained the process for interviewing au pairs from a variety of countries, and provided us with a list of interview questions and a comprehensive handbook to make sure we knew exactly what we were getting into.

Using Skype, we had great conversations with five young women, and lucked out by finding a fit with the sixth. Nico turned out to be everything we needed: an adventurous, determined 21-year-old German woman who was willing to embrace our chaos with open arms. And lucky for us, she could actually yell louder than my son Keenan.

Nico ended up being a huge budget relief at over half the cost of our previous nanny. We essentially monetized our extra bedroom and a share of the bulk meals in exchange for high-quality, personal child care in our home. But she was so

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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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The Solem family with au pair Nicole from Germany

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Chicago Scavenger Hunt

By Vicki O'Leary, Community Counselor in Chicago, IL

Chicago-land au pairs had a special teambuilding meeting in June 2012. Au pairs, Community Counselors and Area Coordinator met at "The Bean" aka Cloud Gate in Millennium Park. The scavenger hunt consisted of solving multiple problems collectively as a team!

The teams searched for architectural icons, sculptures and landmarks throughout the central business district of Chicago. The au pairs had to take photos of their teams at each site after breaking down the clues using their smart

phones and maps. They were asked to stretch their imagination and creativity!

There were specific rules governing the scavenger hunt. The rules gave the perimeter, points per clue and stressed that each team must remain together and have group pictures taken at each location. The au pairs were given a lifeline phone number that they could call for hints to the location of the clue. This lifeline however, if used, would have taken 15 minutes off their time. None of the au pairs

ended up using this option!! They were told they could ask pedestrians, police officers, or anyone that looked like they would have answers to the clues. We had 14 questions worth 5 points each and a bonus question worth 20 points.

The au pairs had to contend with 94-degree heat and beat the clock that was ticking away. They had to answer clues like the following:

1. Some of you experienced "culture" shock when you arrived in the USA... perhaps there is a "center"

for this? It has the largest Tiffany glass dome in the world. Take a picture of the glass dome with all of you looking in awe!

Answer:
The Chicago Cultural Center

2. You can find lions guarding the entrance to this one million square feet building - that is the second largest of its kind in the USA. Take a picture of your group acting scared of the lions!

Answer:
The Art Institute

3. This sculpture was dedicated on August 15, 1967. It weighs 162 tons! It was the first major public art work in Chicago. Picasso was offered payment and refused saying he wanted to make his work a gift to the City of Chicago. This sculpture is displayed in a plaza named for the mayor of Chicago that served from 1955-1976. Take a picture of the sculpture being creative!

Answer:
Picasso Sculpture in Daley Plaza

Area Coordinator Vivi Frumkin had Starbucks gift cards as prizes for the first team to return that had the most points!! The winners of the Summer 2012 Chicago Scavenger Hunt were:

Mareike Wiemker, Janine Boldt and Bianca (Janine's friend)

A big Thank You goes to Vicki for planning, organizing and sharing this fun event!



The Chicago Group in front of "The Bean" in Millennium Park.

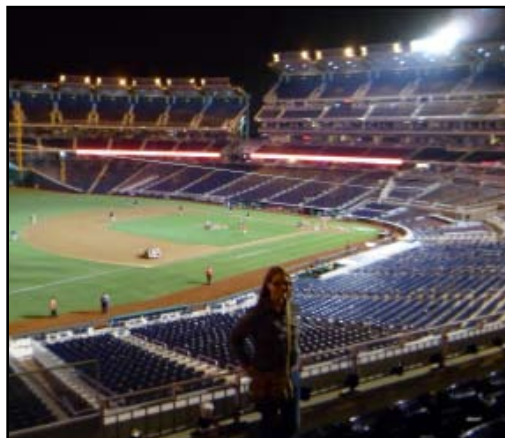
My Au Pair Year in Pictures

By Aline Chardin, Au Pair with the Vol family in Washington, DC



New York City was a good discovery.

My training course in this city was enriching and that gave me opportunity to begin to live my adventure to 200%.



Being an au pair in the USA allows us to do things we cannot do at home.

Since I'm here, I became a big fan of Baseball.



This adventure allowed me to travel and to discover other cities and meet people with whom I can share everything, happiness and homesickness.

With this opportunity to be an au pair in the USA, I could realize one of my dreams by visiting the city of San Francisco.

Thank you to Aline for sharing some of her memories with us!

April 2012 EurAupair Cultural Events



EurAupair Au Pairs gather together on the steps of the New York Public Library.

New York Public Library

The New York Public Library has a long distinguished history in the cultural life of New York City. Recent articles in the New York Times remind us that the New York Public Library is about to undergo a major internal renovation which will bring it into the space age in terms of digital resources and make it

more accessible to the public. We made this visit just in time to see the exhibition on “Ruins and Photography”.

EurAupair would like to thank Marita Falconer, Community Counselor in New Jersey, for sharing the group's visit at the New York Public Library with us.

Wrigley Field Tour

On a beautiful Chicago Sunday in late April, au pairs, community counselors, friends and family gathered under the famous Wrigley Field marquee at Clark and Addison to embark on a behind-the-scenes tour of historic Wrigley Field. Stops along the 90-minute tour included the press box, the visitors' locker room, the Cubs locker room, and the Cubs dugout.

Au pairs learned that Wrigley Field has a rich history and has been used for many things - from

football games, to the winter classic hockey game, musical concerts, boxing matches and, of all things, a ski jump! The au pairs also learned that the manual scoreboard in centerfield has been run by the same family for many years ... and only men change the scores due to lack of indoor plumbing. What a great tour for the Cultural Month!

Thank you to Chicago Community Counselor Dawn Rothermel for writing about this fun and informative April meeting!



Chicago Au Pairs, Community Counselors and Area Coordinator at Wrigley Field.



EurAupair Au Pairs from France, Ukraine, Germany and Brazil enjoy the sunny day at the Botanical Gardens.

St. Louis Botanical Gardens

St. Louis au pairs and community counselors visited the Missouri Botanical Gardens in April. Blooming azaleas, tulips, and more line each path to the amazing Japanese Gardens. After a walk, the girls and counselors visited with each other over lunch.

Thank you to Julie Blow, Community Counselor in St. Louis, for organizing this flowery April event.

Spring Season + Au Pairs + Community Counselors = FUN!

Canoe Excursion

Our expanded group of au pairs from Raleigh, Cary, Fayetteville, Southern Pines, and as far north as Greensboro, NC all got together for one big meeting and one fun trip down the Neuse river. We left the fast paced world behind and took a leisurely 3-mile float through the tree-lined banks of this peaceful river, enjoying the scenic beauty of the Raleigh Canoe Trail. As we floated down

the river, we saw turtles, waterfowl, shorebirds, and deer while peacefully paddling under the canopy of beautiful pines and hardwoods. The trip lasted approximately 1.5 hours. It was a beautiful warm spring day in the South!

EurAupair would like to thank Jean Street, Community Counselor and host mom in North Carolina, for organizing and sharing this close-to-nature, fun event!



Community Counselors Jean Street and Mesa Somer



Au Pair Marta from Spain

The Secret Garden

Rumor has it that this park was the inspiration for the wonderful book "The Secret Garden". Neighbors say that the author, Frances Hodgson Burnett, lived in a big yellow house across the road from the park one summer and when she saw this lovely garden on the remains of a former estate, she had the idea for a book. Because it was an English language book all of our South African au pairs had read the book as children. Whenever we would visit the park, someone would shout 'I have to tell my mother about this... there's the little door!'

Now, many of our au pairs are familiar with the movie and the Broadway play. Where is this little park? It's a secret!

Thank you to New Jersey Community Counselor Marita Falconer for taking us on this "secret" adventure.



Susana (Brazil), Thuy (Germany) and Ana (Colombia) explore the park that locals say was the inspiration for the book "The Secret Garden".

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much more than child care; she was another member of our family. She came along with us on hikes, camping trips, and dinners out. She joined us on our trip to the East Coast, and helped with child care which allowed Jon and I to play some golf, tennis, and have a few nights on the town. Nico fit in beautifully with our family, especially with the kids.

The one small trade-off in reduced child care costs was the challenge of helping someone from another culture navigate America. These were Nico's opening lines on a few panicked phone calls I received in the first few months:

"Hi, Kim? It's Nico. We got to the park okay, but I can't find the way back home. We've been driving around for awhile now, and I'm really not sure where I am; and the road signs are not making sense. Can you give me directions home?"

"Hi, Kim? It's Nico. I'm out bike riding, and I think I took a wrong turn and now I can't find where I am on the map. It's getting dark. Can someone come get me?"

Luckily, despite these small

foibles, Nico was very responsible, respectful, neat and clean, and the kids loved her. She got them playing outside every day and orchestrated amazing art projects. She was afraid of cooking anything other than hard boiled eggs, but that meant the kitchen was spotless each day when I finished work. And she even started preparing the kids for Mother's Day a week in advance (Jon starts the morning of, if I'm lucky).

The best part of our au pair experience has been the wonderful cultural exchange we've enjoyed. Nico teaches our children German traditions and German words, shares pictures and stories of her homeland, and even treated us to an authentic home-cooked German meal (courtesy of a friend visiting from Germany).

And as I'm off to work each morning running a foundation

dedicated to helping kids thrive in life through sports, I know my own children are receiving wonderful care and a great cultural experience, all in the comfort of our own home.

EurAupair would like to thank the Solem family for sharing their au pair experience with us!



Nicole and her host siblings coloring Easter eggs