

Svenja Kupke - EurAuPair Au Pair of the Year 2013!

There are many reasons why an au pair deserves to be EurAuPair's Au Pair of the Year: living in a foreign country with a new family, speaking a foreign language plus providing excellent child care. Svenja Kupke, nominated by the Denenberg family from Omaha, NE, was voted EurAuPair's Au Pair of the Year 2013. Enjoy reading her essay describing why her experience as the Denenberg's au pair was so special.

"You are going where?" "Where is that?" "Why aren't you going to New York, Chicago or Los Angeles?"

Saying yes to a family with 5 children and living in a city I have never heard of (and neither had anyone else) might not be everyone's dream. But the moment I said "yes" to the Denenberg family of Omaha, Nebraska, I had an incredible feeling that it was the best decision I had ever made.

The truth is that it doesn't really matter what city you will live in for the next year. What matters is having a great connection to your host family. The rest is secondary. And believe me, Omaha is magical!

It wasn't at all easy for me to say goodbye to my family for one year, but I'm glad I did. The flight to NYC was my first flight ever. As I boarded the plane, I had no idea what experiences were in store.

Once in New York City I felt



Svenja's host sisters LOVE spending time with her

overwhelmed and couldn't believe that I was actually there. I met a lot of new people from all over the world, who were also launching a year as an au pair. Exchanging experiences and feelings about the whole situation felt quite good. During the workshop in New York, we learned a lot about child care and cultural differences. In our free time we explored this amazing city. Our year was off to an amazing start!

I like to talk about my host family as "my family" because they feel like my very own. So may I present them to you? We have my (host) parents Tippi and Steve, and "my children" Danny (10), Michael

(8), Sasha (6), Sima (4) and Solomon (9 months). Not only do I have the best host family in the world, the extended family (who is in and out all day) is just as loving, patient and helpful. They just work together as one super big family and the dynamic is indescribable.

Is my job as an au pair work or play? When I take care of Michael, I need to pay a lot of attention to him. Michael needs structure, patience and care, so that he understands the consequences of his behavior and actions. Sima, Sasha and Danny require a playful creativity. The girls play with dolls or pretend to be at the beauty salon. We make puppet shows. We go outside to ride bikes, swim, or shoot each other with marshmallows. I'm quite a bit older than they are, but it takes all of my energy to stay one step ahead. I enjoy playing with the kids, because it isn't just work. It is a pleasure to be part of their lives and to watch them grow and learn more and more each day. And I'm really not just playing with them, I am teaching them about right and wrong and they look up to me as a role model.

Then there's logistics. I help drive the kids to schools and pick them up, since 4 kids go to 3 different schools. In no time I proved my ability to adjust and integrate quickly with my family's schedule and daily errands. It makes me very happy, because it



Svenja and Solomon, who was born after Svenja's arrival to the Denenberg family

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Our Au Pair of the Year: Irina Radev from Germany
- Au Pair Meeting in Paris
- Silvia Herran, Au Pair of the Year Finalist
- One Hope United

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".

EurAuPair Intercultural Child Care Programs

250 North Coast Highway
Laguna Beach, CA 92651 USA
Tel: 949/494-5500
Fax: 949/497-6235
E-mail: info@euraupair.com
Web: www.euraupair.com

eurAuPair
Intercultural Child Care Programs
EurAuPair Gazette
250 North Coast Highway
Laguna Beach, CA 92651 USA
Return Service Requested

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Laguna Beach
California 92651
PERMIT NO. 963

Continued on back page...

Our Au Pair of the Year: Irina Radev from Germany

By Host Mom and Community Counselor Dotty Meltesen from Grimes, IA

As I sit down to write to express why my au pair, Irina Radev, should be selected as “Au Pair of the Year”, I cannot help but to remember all the challenges our family has been through over the course of a year. I realize it’s not about a perfect au pair year; it’s about an au pair who gives herself to a family and goes above and beyond what a typical au pair would do. That by definition is what we call an exceptional au pair. Irina Radev was the saving grace to our family this year and this is our “story”:

Irina Radev arrived to our home August 2010. I will never forget the day she arrived and how happy she was when she came running to the kids with hugs. Immediately we were amazed by Irina’s motherly ways and warm smile. My daughter Holly (3) adored her and our boys Cody (5) and TJ (7) quickly warmed up. Two weeks later we gave Irina the test with a family road trip to Chicago. Irina survived it with flying colors. We knew right away we had a great au pair from that day forward.

2010, the thing I remember most is our first Christmas together with Irina. We traveled to Kansas City, made Christmas cookies, and enjoyed Santa Claus with the kids. Irina spent countless hours making Advent Calendars for each of the kids to hang on our stairway and hand stitched them all. We had the MOST amazing Christmas a family could ever ask for and the whole experience was priceless!

Irina’s love towards our children and family is special. She not only took care of the children but she also looked after her host mom and dad non-stop. With Irina, we not only had an au pair, we had a daughter, a

friend, and a grandma all wrapped into one. Irina even helped me plan my renewal vows for a surprise to my husband in Florida 2011. We had an amazing beautiful trip to Florida that summer and the kids had a blast with their au pair!

Irina finished her au pair year for 2010/2011 and had grown really close to the kids. This is where Irina became really special in our

within a family battling cancer. Immediately after my diagnosis, I went into intense chemotherapy for 5 months, surgery, 6 weeks of everyday radiation, and IV treatments that would continue for 1 year. This course of treatment caused my hair to all fall out and nausea daily. Irina helped us by getting groceries and various other tasks. It took everyone in our family to keep the wheels on

stay because she loves your family”.

Irina and I had a heart to heart talk after that. After a lot of tears, Irina and I decided cancer was too hard on this family and it was time this family got busy living. So.... May of 2012 when chemo, surgery, and radiation finished up, Irina and I took a short trip to California just us and we had an amazing trip hiking in the Santa Cruz Mountains. We embarked on an 8 mile hike we will never forget. We finished out the summer the best way we knew possible. That trip was exactly what we all needed to enjoy a beautiful view of what life has to offer.

Irina’s advent calendars were filled one last time before she left our home this year and will continue to grace our stairway forever at Christmas time in her memory. Irina returned to Germany this August of 2012 and watching her leave was the hardest goodbye our family endured. As I write this letter this December 2012, my last cancer treatment is just few days away. As we move forward without her, the children will continue to grow and flourish as that’s what an au pair year is about, our precious gems. We thank you so much Irina Radev for watching over our beautiful children and giving 2 years of your life to our kids when we needed you most! We are forever grateful and know your journey in life will be a beautiful one. You are simply Oxen!

Love you always, your host mom and family “The Meltesens”

EurAupair would like to thank the Meltesen family for sharing their very touching story with us. Congratulations to Irina for being one of this year’s Au Pair of the Year finalists!



Irina sharing a close moment with her host sister Holly

minds. She was already 22, yet she decided to give another year to our family before going on to college. We couldn’t have been happier for that 2nd year! However, that’s when everything changed. Two months later, I was diagnosed with Stage III highly aggressive cancer. The words “cancer treatments” now filled our home and the family trips stopped.

Irina’s entire 2nd year was spent

the bus and meals were brought to our home by caregivers as we made our way through a challenging time.

Irina’s counselor offered to her that she could return home if she wanted, as she didn’t have to stay, during this rough time. I will never forget her counselor’s words to me when I called her one night in tears to ask if Irina wanted to go home. Her counselor said “No she wants to



Irina with her host siblings TJ, Cody and Holly



The Meltesen family and Irina during their summer vacation

Au Pair Meeting in Paris

By Jana Jessen, previous EurAupair Au Pair from Germany

Dear Gazette-Readers,

We would like to introduce us to you: We are an au pair group of nine girls, who spent their au pair time with EurAupair in Southern California between 2008 up to 2010. All of us met in the US and became friends right away. I guess we do not have to tell you that becoming friends with other au pairs starts from the first time you see each other. Having the same topics in mind, talking about your kids and being in the same situations gives you a strong connection you wouldn't miss over this great experience.

Since 2010 a lot of things happened: some of us started studying, one girl even got married and has a child now and one of our friends is able to still be in the USA and study over there. We are coming from several countries: Finland, Germany, France and Mexico.

This year in January we finally got

together again and spent some great days in Paris. Except for two of the girls, everyone was able to make it and we had such a great time together!

The time in America still has a huge impact on our life and we are really blessed to know that this friendship made in America will connect us through our whole life. Friendship can still continue when you are miles away from each other, it has nothing to do with how many times you can see each other – it is all about the experience you made and the great time you had together.

We wish all of you a great time being an au pair and we hope that all of you will find those great friends that we did. Lots of Love from the SoCal au pair group 2008-2010!

Thank you to Jana and her au pair friends for sharing this story with all of us at the EurAupair Gazette.



From left to right: Jasmin (Germany), Tiffany (France), Ida (Finland), Marine (France), Maïke (Germany), Alice (France) and Jana (Germany)

Silvia Herran, Au Pair of the Year Finalist

By the Pellerito Family from Plandome, NY

The word “au pair” does not even begin to describe Silvia! “Au pair” by definition means “on par” or equal to...but Silvia has gone over and above all senses of the word au pair! Her love and devotion to our family has truly surpassed her role as an au pair!

Silvia joined our family in early April 2012. She came from a beautiful northern city in Spain called Santander. From the minute she walked into our home, she started helping us as if she had been with our family forever!

The morning she came, I had to have emergency heart surgery, so I was not able to greet her. We have two small children, Gregory, 4 years old and Jessica, 2 years old. When Silvia walked through the door, she immediately began assisting with playing, diaper changing and

cleaning up after the children.

She began her journey with our family willingly, happily and with much understanding, support and love. Gregory and Jessica fell in love with her!

When I returned home from the hospital, Silvia greeted me with a big smile and beautiful gifts that she brought from her country! She assured me that everything was going well with the children and gave me her promise that she was there to help me through this difficult time! I took a deep breath and felt right away that I had made the right decision with Silvia!

It is extremely emotionally challenging when a mother has to find help with her children. With all of the craziness going on in the world today, deciding to have a stranger come into your home is difficult! There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty and worry that you make the right choice. Silvia put my mind at ease. I knew I made the right choice from the very beginning.

We have a very large family. In addition to Gregory and Jessica, we have three other children. Pete, 25 years old, Nick, 22 years old and Michael, 13 years old. The children's grandparents are an integral part of our everyday life as well.

Silvia learned quickly that our lives are extremely dynamic, and our schedules change from week to

week, and sometimes from day to day! The word “consistent” does not exist in our home! She has been very flexible with her schedule in order to accommodate us in our busy lives! When plans change at the last minute, Silvia is eager to help us!

Silvia impresses us daily with her resourcefulness. She has networked not only with EurAupair, but with many other au pair programs in our area. She has made friends all over Long Island, Manhattan and all of our surrounding suburbs. She has made so many friends in such a small amount of time!

Silvia also takes advantage of every free minute she has to visit other cities in America. She has to date visited Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Boston, Niagara Falls, Miami and Atlantic City. She has plans to visit many more!

Silvia has taken English courses at Long Island University, Nassau Community College and the Port Washington Public Library. She continues to improve her English and optimizes every opportunity she can to learn more. In 8 short months, her English skills have improved tremendously!

If I had to point out something about Silvia that I will never forget, it is the two weeks that our family experienced following Hurricane Sandy. Long Island was hit very hard. We were blessed that we had no

injuries or damage. We were surrounded by devastation! Our biggest challenge with two little children was losing electricity for 2 weeks. Silvia was an angel sent from heaven, helping us again through another difficult time. She kept Gregory and Jessica calm, creatively finding ways to play without electricity. She continued to support our family in every way she could help us!

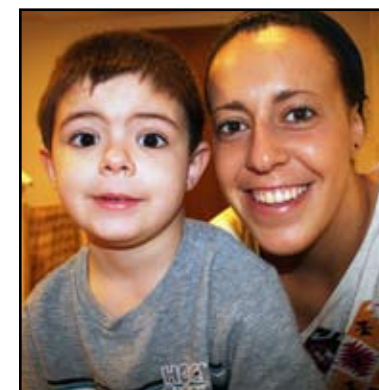
In conclusion, I want to tell you that I am writing this nomination while I sit in a waiting room, waiting for the doctor to tell me that my 13 year old is out of surgery. My heart is pounding and I am praying that all is going well.

At home, Silvia is taking care of everything, once again assuring me that I can have peace of mind when it comes to things at home. I can focus here on my 13 year old without worry. I could not do this without her. She is an angel, the extra hand I need in my life right now. God Bless Her.

EurAupair would like to thank the Pellerito family for nominating Silvia as Au Pair of the Year and for sharing their memories with us!



Silvia with her host sister Jessica



Silvia and Gregory, her host brother

One Hope United

By Shana Mallin, Host Mom in Chicago, IL

One Hope United serves over 10,000 children and families in Wisconsin, Illinois and Florida and helps safeguard the welfare of vulnerable children through community based and in-home programs. The organization helps protect children and keep families together. If we start at the center of the family – the home – and help prevent and/or work through issues, we can prevent children from being taken from their families and placed into foster care. Our efforts assure the future prosperity of our communities' families.

In the past we have had Christmas parties for the families where we engage Santa Claus to deliver the new toys, winter outerwear and grocery gift cards that au pairs, friends and families so graciously donated. The EurAupair au pairs have played the role of Santa's Elves

to paint faces, man carnival games and play with the kids.

In November 2012, two Illinois au pairs, Julia Neumeister from

Germany and Julie Collinet from France, their Community Counselor Gila Peller as well as Shana Mallin had another holiday party for the

kids at Pickus Center in Waukegan, IL. They helped start the kids' holidays with gifts, refreshments, and holiday songs.

In addition, we spent time with a group of teenagers – all single moms – who attend school and have their children in daycare. School and daycare is in the same building. As long as the young mothers are in school getting their high school degree, the daycare only costs \$2 per month. The mothers and children get free lunches and the moms can visit with the children during lunch time.

Thank you to Shana Mallin and Gila Peller for organizing such a meaningful monthly meeting and for informing us about the One Hope United organization.



EurAupair host mom Shana Mallin, Community Counselor Gila Peller and au pairs Julia (Germany) and Julie (France) get together with young mothers and their children at the One Hope United Center in Waukegan, IL.

...continued from front page

makes Tippi and Steve happy.

In the middle of my year, Solomon was born. I took responsibility for the young family while Mom and Dad were at the hospital. Then came baby fun. Changing diapers, cooking delicious baby foods and feeding the newborn were built into our daily routine. And if I may say, it is an indescribable feeling to see a little person growing up, to see him change and learn more things day after day! It's also a precious responsibility to take care of an infant...a responsibility that I will be proud to mention to future employers.

I loved my personal journey this year. Another au pair named Bianca lived just down the street. I now count her as one of my closest friends. We connected in a way that is hard to explain, but I made in her a friend for life!

My host mom is a very loving, well organized, and awesome mom who speaks a few languages. She is also an amazing cook. Since we spend a lot of time in the kitchen together, a frequent topic is English and German linguistic "twists". For example, the American who is the first to try something becomes a "guinea pig", but the adventurous German becomes a "bunny". And when in love, you are flying on the German Cloud 7 but the American Cloud 9. If you can't sit still in

English, you have "ants in your pants", but in German: bumble bees. But the sayings "long time no see" and "silence is golden" are the same. Most importantly, as different as we are in culture and lifestyle, in the end we are all the same. We all have the same needs and joys.

My time here in the U.S. has been quite exciting. In October, I visited Vala's Pumpkin Patch, a family farm with Halloween attractions. I took a road trip to beautiful Colorado Springs. In May, I attended the famous "Annual Berkshire Hathaway Meeting" where I heard Warren Buffett, America's most famous investor, speak in person. In July, the family took vacation back to Colorado where we rode horses, hiked to a four-level tree house and visited the real ranch where Tippi attended summer camp. In August, we donned baseball caps for a live College World Series game where I figured out some rules of America's favorite past time. Next on the docket are trips to Las Vegas and Club Med in Florida.

Being an au pair is a great way to see the country, and my friends and I made the most of it. We went to Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle. All are incredible cities and definitely worth visiting. After that was another trip to Orlando to see the "Harry Potter World" in Universal Studios. We continued our trip on the beach in the Caribbean during Bianca's

travel month.

The kids and I grew so close together that Sasha asked me if I could stay with them forever. Part of me feels the same way. The years 2011, 2012 and 2013 (I extended my stay for six months) have been the best time of my life! I learned so many new things and got to know so many incredible people who I will truly miss when I am back.

So you never know what awaits you at a new place. I didn't expect this unknown city to change my life

so profoundly. What about Omaha was so magical? --The many fun things to do, and the friendly and awesome people who live there. This magic definitely made me fall in love with the city, my family and the people! My time as an au pair has been unforgettable, and I can't recommend this experience highly enough."

Congratulations to Svenja for winning EurAupair's Au Pair of the Year 2013 title!



Svenja with her host sisters on 4th of July