

Jacqueline Märtsch - EurAuPair Au Pair of the Year 2015

By German Au Pair Jacqueline, who lives with the Gerstenberg Family in Springfield, VA

The first week went by so fast, everything was a blur. I just knew I was in New York City, everything was like a dream. "Am I really in the States or am I just dreaming?"

I walked down the stairs at the airport in Washington D.C. and there was my new family. I was really excited, but also very exhausted and tired. New York and the jetlag did their work on me. I was warmly welcomed by everyone, everyone except my 2 year old. She was crying and screaming the whole time. My first thought was, "OMG, what am I doing here? Was it the right decision to go to the US? To choose this family?" And then my 4 year old took my hand, looked me in the eye and said: "Don't worry, I'll show you the way. Just come with me!" He didn't let go of my hand until we were next to the car. That was the last moment I was scared that I took the wrong path. That was the moment I knew that I was in the right place, with the right family. I was right where I belong. It was fate that we ended up together.

I can't believe that all that was 17 months ago. Wow! 17 months of joy, happiness, love, friendship, and new experiences, but also 17 months of learning, challenges, and work.

The first challenge I had to master was my oldest boy Erik. Erik is not like any other 7 year old boy. He can be the nicest and loveliest older brother in the whole world, but only when he wants to. He has a mild form of autism so it was a real challenge for me to understand him and his nature, to understand why he's doing what he's doing and when he's doing it. We had a hard time in the beginning and just a few months ago again, too. We have days he just loves me and cuddles with

me and shows me that he loves me. But there are also other days he tells me that he hates me and wants me gone for good; he even threw away my toothbrush. My host mom Kelly really helped me through that time. She sat down with me and talked with me about it and explained everything to me, so I understood why he did it and what's behind it. I love him and I know he feels the same about me, but at times, it has been hard to see beyond his challenging behavior. But we have worked through it and are now closer than before. I even

to see videos of first steps or first words and not being able to kiss and cuddle them. But I have fun sending packages with toys and clothes from the US. Through all that I learned even when one door is closing, another one opens. Maybe I didn't see the first steps of my godson, but I saw the first day of Kindergarten for Max, the first time Milly used the potty all by herself, and the first time Erik played soccer. I know I made sacrifices, like all the other au pairs, but in the end I can say that it was worth it, because I will have my

family, godsons, and friends for the rest of my life, and I added five more wonderful people to my life forever- the Gerstenbergs.

Towards the end of my first year, I felt that my English was stable enough to join a volunteer fire department. Since I'm a volunteer fire fighter in Germany, it was my wish from the beginning, and we eventually found a fire department I was able to join. Before I was able to ride

the ambulance, I had to do five different classes, as well as learn the vocabulary and location of all the equipment in the ambulance. That was a lot of work and I spent hours of hours on learning since at that point I didn't even know the word 'fire extinguisher'. I had to learn it in German first and then translate it into English, which made it even more time intensive. I was really scared, especially before the tests at the end of each class, but I managed every single one. I have never been more proud of myself than when I passed every single class and I appreciate my host family so much for giving me the flexibility and support to accomplish this goal around my taking care of the kids.

Continued on Page 2...



A fun winter day in Virginia – Jacqueline with her host siblings.

learned things about myself I didn't know about before. Now I know that I have a lot more patience with kids than I had expected, that every outburst of a kid has a meaning behind it and that with patience and love you can understand it and help the kid through it.

It was also very hard for me when I first arrived to accept that my friends and family back in Germany are moving forward with their lives even when I'm not there. It was most difficult in the beginning when four of my friends announced their engagements shortly after I arrived and I learned that they would hold their weddings while I was still in the US. Three other friends had babies, one of whom is my godson. It sometimes feels heart-wrenching

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- EurAuPair Au Pair of the Year 2015
- Bridge Tour Chicago
- We love being Au Pairs!!
- EurAuPair Photos

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

eur AuPair
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

Bridge Tour Chicago

By Chicago Area Coordinator Vivi Frumkin

Chicago and Cook County are home to one of the largest collections of historic bridges in the country, and no other city in the world has more movable bridges. So it was a pleasure to get a tour of the historic Lake Street Bridge, which is only one of two movable bridges along the Chicago Loop that carry the CTA "L" trains.

Bridge history:
Lake Street Bridge is the site of where Chicago's first crossing of the river was made, when a ferry was

ordered at this location in 1829.

The first documented bridge at Lake Street was built of wood in 1849. It was rebuilt in 1859. In 1885, an iron bridge was built and converted into a double-deck bridge in 1893. The Lake Street Bridge retains original design control house operating equipment, and the mechanics in the basement are largely unchanged from the original design as well.

We started our tour in the Tender House Control Room,

where our guide explained that the old equipment is still in use today.

Then down to the basement we went. Here we could see and hear all the gears working when they opened the bridge. We waited until 17 pleasure boats had passed the Lake Street Bridge and then the bridge went down. Once down it only took a couple of minutes before we could hear the train going across.

Mike, our tour guide, was very informative. Anybody

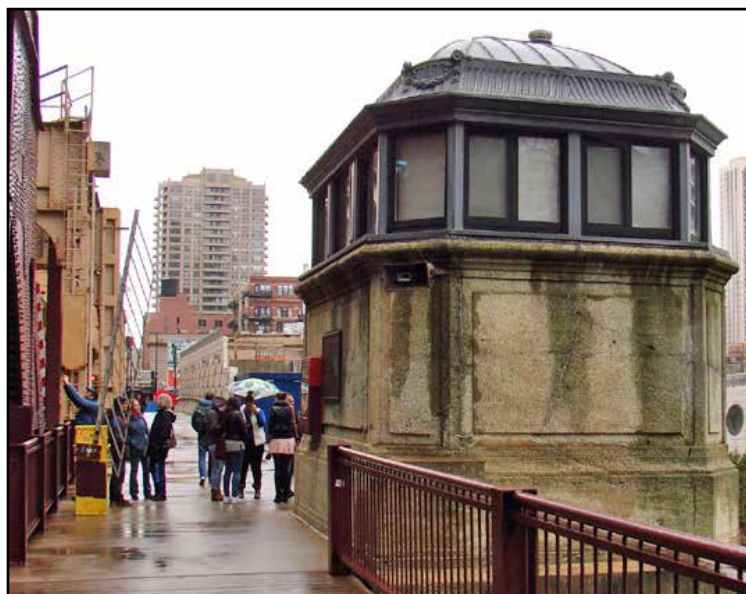
wanting more information on Chicago's Lake Street Bridge can follow this link:

<http://www.historicbridges.org>

Thank you to Community Counselor Vicki O'Leary for organizing this tour and thank you to Area Coordinator Vivi Frumkin for writing the article as well as sharing the photos with us.



Chicago Au Pairs, Community Counselor and Area Coordinator enjoying the tour and learning about the historic bridge.



Outside the Tender House, at Lake Street Bridge.

...Continued from Front Page

But despite all these challenges, and even a few failures, I can honestly say that I would do it all over again, exactly the same way, with exactly the same amazing family. I have overcome these challenges not only through my own perseverance and determination, but also because of the dedication of a terrific host family, incredible friends, and

the best EurAupair counselor I could wish for – Kelley Land. She has played a large role in my American life with her endless love, patience, and never-ending ideas for new meetings. She simply rocks!

The biggest lesson I've learned since becoming an au pair is that with patience and hard work I can do anything I put my mind to. I also learned that true friendship can endorse great distance even for a longer time. Those challenges

have helped me become a better au pair. They trained me to be a better mom in the future, and taught me about myself. I have learned and grown through this exchange program. I'm going to take back to Germany all these amazing things I learned about myself and about life. Because of my amazing

host family, and fabulous friends, I'm going back to Germany as a better version of myself.

Being an au pair is more than just a job or providing good child care for a family, it's learning about yourself, what you can do and how you can grow, returning home as

a different person because of all you've experienced. I'm proud to say that my heart will never again be whole because it will forever be in two places – America and Germany. Some may think that sounds sad, but that's what it means to have more than one home. Springfield, VA will always be part of my life, the city where I changed the most and helped me to become a better version of myself. I've learned incredible things, found a new loving

family and felt the true and pure love of "my" children.

Congratulations, Jacqueline, for winning this year's Au Pair of the Year Award!! And thank you for all the wonderful videos, photos and essays provided by you and your Host Family!



Happy Halloween!!



Jacqueline and her Host Family, the Gerstenbergs, celebrating Christmas.

We love being Au Pairs!!

Chriszelle, Simone and Christelle, all three from South Africa, share why becoming an au pair was their best decision ever!

Au Pair Chriszelle Dickson who lives with the Bennett Family in Hoboken, NJ, writes to EurAupair's partner office in South Africa, "Carla's Au Pairs":

I am based in Hoboken, NJ and I love it. It's pretty much a walking town and everything is centralized, I don't even miss NYC.

My host family is AmazeBallZZzzz, I couldn't have had it any other way. We click, we get along, we chat and most of all is I get treated like family.

I have so much fun with my kid and she adores me, I get little kisses and hugs all day long! My kid Kane says if I decide to leave,

she definitely wants a South African au pair... Ahhhhhh, I'm getting so attached.

I have made great new friends in my neighborhood and through EurAupair and we have fabulous times together - I feel like a year is just not enough and I might consider extending.

So I just wanted to say Thank You to the team and to Carla who made it all possible: you guys really do a great job and work with us. I appreciate the regular check-in and just the fact that you make sure we are well. My community counselor is fantastic and looks after us well. So Thank You, All!

With lotsa love all the way from Hoboken, Chriszelle



What an adorable photo of Chriszelle and her host sister Kane.

From Simone Steyn who spent her original year with the Renken Family in Alexandria, VA and is now hosted by the Beales Family in Yorktown, VA:

When I first decided that I wanted to be an au pair, I never thought in a million years that my life would change this much, this fast. I left my family and friends in South Africa to pursue a lifelong dream, and it's the best decision I've ever made. Sure, I miss my family a lot, but the experience is just so great, that I can't imagine



Simone with her four host girls – we love this photo!

being back home, if I can be here in America experiencing all of this.

EurAupair is a great program that I will recommend to anybody, any day. They really try and help out as much as they can and go the extra mile for us au pairs, and thanks to the community counselor we have, we always have a great support system.

This is truly a great experience, not only because you get to tour and see a different country and explore their cultures and history, but you also meet au pairs from other countries from across the world and make friends for life. It's nice having people who understand what you're going through and who can support each other.

The monthly meetings are awesome, because we get to have some fun together and relax, interact with our group and talk about our different experiences, and it gives us the time to be able to talk to our community counselor if we have any problems. Our community counselor is the best - she always goes the extra mile for all of us and will always be there to listen.

I also know that I'm really lucky to have gotten such an incredible host family. I just love

them; they're such great kids and have the best parents. They all made me feel at home from the first day I got here and made me feel like I'm a part of the family from the start. We have so much fun together, and I've grown so close to them that I know that saying goodbye at the end of all of this, is truly going to be heartbreaking. There's nothing quite like hearing a toddler laugh hysterically over something silly or when they come over to you and give you the biggest hug ever, not because they have to, but because they want to - warms my heart and puts a smile on my face. Every time.

If I could give any advice to any future au pairs, it would probably be: ask a lot of questions before you decide on a family - you're going to be living with them for a whole year, and if you get all the information you need beforehand, it not only prepares you for what to expect, but it really helps to make things easier for you and might help in having a good relationship with your host family. And have fun when you get here. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity - don't let it slip through your fingers! :)

Christelle Fourie who spent her original program with the Eddy Family in Roanoke, VA and extended with the Behrens Family in Waxhaw, NC shares with us:

When I got the news that I was finally going to America I was overwhelmed with happiness! My first stop would be in Big Lick (Roanoke, VA). Here I spent my first year with the Eddy family. They truly became my family, my home away from home. We went on loads of adventures to Florida and Washington, DC where Jen, my host mom, took me to see notable places such as the White House and the Spy Museum!

Myself, Eman and Lilly loved to go to nearby parks for bike rides and picnics as well as the swimming pool. Here I experienced my first Thanksgiving, a real traditional American holiday. We went for a turkey trot early in the morning, cooked dinner together and gave thanks as a family. Christmas was just as amazing, especially the process leading up to

Christmas, which includes the picking of a tree and chopping it down to later decorating it.

For my second year I moved to Waxhaw, NC, which is just on the outer skirts of Charlotte. Here I was hosted by the Behrens family Minette (mom), Kalie (dad), Ulrich (12 years), Carmen and Mikaela (twins, 8 years) and lastly Heinz (1 year). Let's just say with a big family like this there is never a dull moment! From fish hooks caught in an arm, to road trips across the state and apple picking to celebrating autumn.

I can say without a doubt that this is one nation with a whole lot of diverse cultures - from Western cowboys to Southern hospitality, I have experienced it all. Coming as an au pair to the USA was one of the best decisions I have ever made. You grow so much as a person and an individual. The culture overflows with love and patriotism. Although it is a very fast moving country, you will always have the countryside to take a step back to breathe and take a break.



Christelle apple picking with her host siblings - very beautiful photo.

EurAupair sends a big Thank You to Chriszelle, Simone and Christelle for summarizing their au pair experience in such a fun way! The photos are super cute, too!

EurAupair Photos



The Hayes family from Bloomington, IL had a great year with their au pair Maren from Germany. Even though they are sad that she returned home after her year, they are looking forward to many more memories with their new au pair Apolline from France.



EurAupair Community Counselors from the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento and San Jose had fun at this year's Community Counselor training. From left to right: Yvonne, Melodee, Julia, Immanual, Josefine, Liesa, Jeanette and Krishna!

For their February meeting, au pair Alicia (Spain) and Community Counselor Alexandra Boutiette took a tour in the Iowa Capitol Building, learned a lot about Iowan history and politics and enjoyed the weather at the park in front of the building.



Indiana Community Counselor Darcy Voreis and Xia from China had a fun time baking. After finding all the ingredients and measuring cups and spoons, they spent the next hour and a half making the scones. Nancy (Xia) was a real trooper and learned how to measure everything quickly. They ended up with 24 lightly browned scones slightly burned on the bottom, because the parchment paper caught on fire! She took the best dozen home for her host family.

Even though it was freezing cold, New Jersey au pairs and Community Counselor had lots of fun ice skating on a winter day.



Host Mom and Community Counselor Dotty Meltesen from Des Moines, IA recently visited her previous au pairs in Germany. The girls enjoyed showing their 'mom' around their home towns and sharing their favorite German foods. How wonderful that Dotty and her au pairs are still in touch – such long lasting relationships is what the au pair program is all about! In the photos you can see Dotty with Carolin, Felicitas and Lilly.