

Transformed Lives, One Au Pair at a Time

By Dee Kayalar Polat, Host Mom from Brooklyn, NY

As a mom to a beautiful two and a half year old girl and living and working in Brooklyn, NY, I have been blessed to live with three au pair girls from France. I was six months pregnant when I first searched the Internet to find out what child care options would be available to me after my baby was born. Living as immigrants in the absence of support from family and faced with the reality of having to go back to work after just three months, my husband and I knew we had to find a reliable child care option.

Unfortunately, full time experienced nannies were too expensive to afford and sites like care.com or sittercity.com did not offer full time care options on a long term basis. That's when I recalled a former professor's wife whose children I often took care of back in grad school, who mentioned she had been an au pair as a young woman and learned two new languages that way. I remember feeling moved when she told me how she was invited to the wedding of the child she once many years ago took care of.

With that memory, I set to work. I found out only a handful of au pair programs existed that were credible. Since I was a Francophile, I naturally leaned towards programs that included a formidable number of French girls in their portfolio. EurAuPair was one such program that was relatively affordable, featured French au pairs, and received good reviews. I immediately put in an application and our au pair journey soon began.

I have to say up front that the program might not be a right fit for everyone. While every au pair program's guidelines may differ, the program requires the host family to offer room and board for a foreign person in exchange for his or her assistance with child care

and some housework. Duration of the program is generally one year; au pairs receive a weekly stipend; their meals need to be provided; they have to complete English classes and their hours cannot exceed a certain amount per day and per



Marla Liv with the family's first au pair Chloé Altemaire from Paris, France.

week. Different from a traditional employer-employee relationship, au pair girls need to be integrated into the life and culture of the host family.

With my Turkish/Greek heritage and over half a lifetime spanning Bloomington, IN; Weimar, Germany, New York and Moscow, the idea of fulfilling cultural exchange by opening up our home to a young woman from a different culture, one

that I particularly loved, excited me. Two years and two au pairs after, we now happily welcomed our third one. Host mom life is not always pink roses and sunny days but it is meaningful and continues to grow me as a mom and as a woman. Here is what these girls taught me which I will appreciate for life, and what we hope they learned during the course of their stay with us.

Our first two au pairs turned 21 during their host family stay with us. While one was social, gregarious, and animated, the other was reserved, creative, and adventurous. Both were independent, having lived and worked away from their families for a considerable time. Both were god moms affectionately attached to their god children.

I watched with admiration how close they were with their moms yet how beautifully and delicately they separated their private life from their family life with parents. Just by way of choosing to do this program, we knew they were courageous and curious. Both girls have touched my daughter's life in ways unimaginable. While my girl was blessed with the warmth of our first au pair's lullabies and endless time on play mats and jumpers playing with toys and pets; her creativity and curiosity have reached new heights with our second one's passion for arts and crafts and new places.

Some of the things I learned in addition to French girls' love for daily baths, hair washing, fashion and perfumes, and their delightful nicknames are 1) they need clear instructions 2) clarification of expectations and 3) boundless empathy and patience. Having grown up in multiple cultures and constantly challenged to shift my reality, I realized I often took for granted my own ability to adapt easily, Continued on Page 4...



The family with their second Au Pair Coralie Blas from Cambrai, France.

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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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Where Are You Now?

By Ilona Kinnunen, previous Au Pair and current Intern at EurAupair

It's been almost eight years since I and four other girls spent a year in California as au pairs. Now that we are full into our adult lives, I wanted to see how they are doing. Specifically, I wanted to know how the au pair year has affected their lives ever since.

my job nor my profession. It was my way of life in this year. Where my host family went, I went, when they were happy, I was happy. I had the opportunity to become part of their family and they filled a place in my heart I didn't know existed." She truly believes that choosing

company in Mexico that sells car parts. She is a Technical Analyst which is part of an IT team that gives support to the stores. The locations of the stores include Unites States, Puerto Rico, and Brazil and she is using mostly English.

Tiffany is from France. She was 20 years old when she met her host family of six: mom, dad, 9-year-old twin girls, and 6 and 3 year old boys. They became her second family and she is currently visiting them here in the US. She mentioned that they just celebrated the youngest boy's 10th birthday. Not only did she gain a second family, but she also said she gained 10 years of maturity. She explains: "You learn a lot about yourself. You are trusted with the well-being of kids, which is the most important trust a parent can give you. I learned that every day is not easy but that friends and family can support you through it. I learned not to give up when sometimes I was very homesick. I learned that if you give it a chance, then you can really spend the most amazing year of your life." Tiffany believes that the year completely shaped her life. When she went back to France, she utilized her fluency in the English language and finished her Bachelor's degree in English and gained a second degree in Tourism and Hospitality. The travel bug she got from the au pair year led her first to Australia where

she worked and traveled, and then to Brazil for 6 months. Now she works in France in a bookstore that is specialized in traveling. Tiffany says that the au pair experience was the most amazing experience of her life and to the girls who are considering becoming an au pair she says: "Go, go, go!! Go have the best year of your life!"

Alice is also from France and she was 22 years old when she was an au pair. Her host family had three children, but she mainly took care of the 3-year-old twins. Just like Tiffany, Alice too thinks she gained 10 years of maturity in one year. She discovered who she really was, which was sometimes quite different from the expectations of the people back home. It opened her mind, she became more tolerant and independent, and she gained self-confidence. Back home, Alice got a job as an event communicator in the cinema field, which she did for a while. However, this was not something she wanted and off she went to travel first in Australia and then in South East Asia for a total of a year and a half. The year as an au pair had left a mark in her in terms of child care and she realized how passionate she was about Early Childhood Education, Psychology, and Pedagogy. After all, the year of working with small children taught her patience, creativity, and responsibility. Alice says: "I think that my au pair experience opened my mind to different ways to raise and educate children. The American education was so different from what I knew from France. I think it is the reason why today I am studying the alternative pedagogies." Today, she is studying to get specialized in the Montessori methods adapted for babies. She mentions how the year changed her life and adds: "Even though it was not always easy... If you give it all, it will give you so much in return!"

A big Thank You to Ilona and her au pair friends who shared how being an au pair shaped their future life. All of you can be very proud of what you have accomplished!



Tiffany is currently visiting her host family in Orange County, CA. The then-9-year-old twins are now 16 years old.

For all the girls, except Alice, this was the first time they lived abroad for a longer period of time, away from their parents and everything familiar.

I had just turned 23 years when I started my year as an au pair. My host family consisted of a mom, dad and three children aged 6, 9, and 11. The year gave me so much and I ended up extending for another year in the same family. I studied English at a local community college for the two years as part of the educational requirement. When my second year was coming to an end, I decided to apply to the same community college and pursue the Associates of Arts degree for transfer. After that, I went back to Finland for a year to work and spend time with my family, but I knew I wanted to finish my college education in the States. So I came back to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. I will be graduating in August and currently I am doing an internship at EurAupair in Laguna Beach. I feel like this has come full circle and I am now being able to give back to the amazing organization that truly has changed so many people's lives.

Jana, back then a 20-year-old girl from Germany, had a host family with three kids, an 8-year-old girl and baby twin girls. She says: "[Being an] Au pair was never

to become an au pair was the best decision of her life. She has carried a saying "Be the change you want to see in the world" with her that she was given by her host mom and she lives by that quote. After returning to Germany, Jana went back to school and recently gained her master's degree in Communication Management and is currently a part of a two-year trainee program in corporate communications and government relations at BASF in Germany. She gives a lot of credit to the year as an au pair for who she is now and is grateful for all the amazing memories, friendships and a place she can call home.

Dani arrived to Newport Beach, CA, from Chihuahua, Mexico, in 2009 when she was only 19 years old. Her host family consisted of a mom, a dad and three children aged 4, 6, and 7. The family was very active, playing sports, doing yoga in the morning, and the children took cultural classes like Greek and Spanish. With a busy schedule like this and the challenges and responsibilities it brought, Dani gained in maturity and tools to overcome any problems. She mentions: "You are more aware and conscious of everything that surrounds you and happens." During the year, she became fluent in English. Today Dani is working for a famous



Tiffany's host brother and youngest of the family just turned 10 years old!

EurAupair Photos



Our Minneapolis, St. Paul and Monticello, MN Community Counselors Debra Nagy, Chrissy Fischer and Crystal Bray had a combined meeting with their au pairs and visited the State Capitol in St. Paul. Happy girls!



Our Anchorage, AK au pairs and Community Counselor Linne Weinberger went dogsledding with the SEEING DOUBLE team. What a very unique meeting, it must have been an amazing experience!



German Au Pair Andrea and her Community Counselor Elizabeth Young toured Glen Eyrie Castle in Colorado Springs, CO. What an absolutely beautiful photo!



Our Portland, OR Community Counselor Phyllis Mosteller and her group of au pairs visited the Portland Rose Garden. Even though it was a bit rainy, everyone had a great time and enjoyed the beautiful Oregon nature.



Our San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Sacramento community counselors and area coordinator had a lot of fun at the annual community counselor training. From left to right: Kathryn, Yvonne, Liesa, Leigh, Area Coordinator Cynthia, Hannah, Nathalie, Jeanette and Jill.



For their April cultural meeting the Chicago downtown au pairs met at Community Counselor Sophie Baal's house for an Easter brunch. The au pairs got to enjoy some Easter treats and had fun competing to be the best/most artistic Easter egg decorator. They enjoyed talking about their plans for Easter and what their Easter traditions at home are.



One of our Carbondale, CO host families invited the au pairs and Community Counselor Maggie Cruz for a potluck and egg-dyeing evening. In the photo are Maggie with her daughter Viviana, Fabiana (Venezuela), Daphne (South Africa), Luisa (Colombia), Heather (South Africa) and Dara (France).

EurAupair Says Thank You and Farewell to Ingrid & Don Grill

By Area Coordinator Jess Schmidt from Doylestown, PA

One of EurAupair's longest serving Community Counselor teams has retired. Ingrid and Don Grill, of Altoona, PA, have stepped down after twenty years of dedication to our program. They will be greatly missed.

Throughout the years, Ingrid and Don



German Au Pair Sandy and Ingrid Grill.

have been counselors to dozens of au pairs. Having three sons themselves, the au pairs came to be the "daughters they never had", and Ingrid became known as their "American Grandmom". The Grills have a very special way about them, and welcomed each au pair into their group warmly with open arms. If ever an au pair was feeling homesick, Ingrid's smile and encouragement would undoubtedly pull them out of their sadness. The continued support they provided for each au pair is extraordinary.

Ingrid and Don have been an invaluable asset to EurAupair, and they will be greatly missed. We were very fortunate to have them be with our program for so many years. EurAupair thanks Ingrid and Don immensely for all the love and support they have shown to their au pairs and host families! Cheers and hugs to our dear friends!!

EurAupair sends a big Thank You to Ingrid and Don for having been such dedicated Community Counselors, you will be missed! Thank you also to Jess for honoring Ingrid and Don in our Gazette.



Ingrid Grill with her last three Au Pairs Jessica, Theresa and Natalia.

Amazing Trip to The Grand Canyon

By German Au Pair **Wiebke Klein** who is hosted by the **Thomas Family** in **Huntertown, IN**

And there I was again – sitting in an airplane on my way to Phoenix... My excitement about this trip was written in my face – I just could not stop smiling at people during the whole flight! In less than 24 hours I would experience the view into the South Rim of the Grand Canyon – and I just could not wait.

My au pair friend Sara and I had planned this trip for a few months. Luckily her host



Road trip with your best friend – it can't get any better.

grandparents offered us to stay at their place in a neighborhood close to Superstition Mountain close to Phoenix. From there, every Saturday buses ride to the Grand Canyon. This was a unique chance for us, which we just could not miss!

After my 3 hour flight from Chicago to Phoenix I finally arrived in Arizona in the middle of the night which kept me from seeing the beautiful desert. But after a night of sleep, I could not close my mouth when I was standing on the balcony of Sara's host grandparents' house. The desert is just impressing!!! Especially for Europeans, I guess, because we don't have

any desert around us (sadly).

After one day of hiking through the mountains of Mesa, my excitement for the Grand Canyon increased more and more. How pretty would the Grand Canyon be, I was already deeply impressed by Superstition Mountain.

Really early Saturday morning my little au pair dream came true and we were picked up for the tour. The drive was really long! It

was probably about 3.5 hours until we finally saw the entrance of the park. But because Sara and I are really talkative around each other, the ride passed fast. (That's why a little advice for all travelers: travel always with your best friend who is just as crazy as you are! We had a lot of fun only by talking!)

Everything was so different than I expected on our ride to the park. I thought we would just drive all the time through desert until we see the Rim. But because we were coming from Phoenix and not Las Vegas the landscape is covered with forest and you see a lot of green nature on the way.

When we finally arrived at our first outlook, Sara and I were just jumping out of the bus to walk as fast as we could to the point where you could get a peek into the Rim. We just wanted to prove to ourselves that the view would be like in all the



Here they enjoy the beautiful view.

pictures we had seen in our English-class-books back in high school.

We both realized that the view was much more incredible than any picture could ever show. We are both not able to describe how impressive, beautiful, amazing and unbelievable the Rim actually is. Everyone should experience it for themselves. Words cannot describe the truth!

The bus tour we booked made several stops to enjoy the view into the Rim from different points. Most of the time we had around 45

minutes to enjoy the view and walk around a little which was great! I think for our first trip to the Grand Canyon it was a good decision to book a bus tour, because we were able to get our first own impression of the Rim. But now after seeing the Rim in real life, I want to go back one time and hike on my own into the Rim to experience the whole park much more intense.

So this is a recommendation (or basically a duty) if you have the chance to go and discover this park. It doesn't matter how expensive the flight is – it is just worthwhile and trust me, your will not be mad at me for this advice. Afterwards you will be thanking me, because it is just unbelievably pretty!!!

Thank you, Wiebke, for this fun article about your trip to the Grand Canyon – we enjoyed reading it very much! And how great that you and Sara could experience the Grand Canyon together.



Wiebke and Sara (both from Germany) at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

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come up with creative solutions, and deliver to as near perfection as possible in order to survive.

Consequently, I had to let go from the very beginning my expectation for them "to get it" at once - to get our house rules, get the long work hours, get what it takes to live together. This meant we needed to deliver and redeliver clear instructions about child care requirements, our limitations on cell phone and TV use, and daily household chores. It meant we needed to remind them to prioritize our little girl and not be distracted

by the energy, the sights, and downright sexiness of this city during work hours. All this while being emphatic to their youth, upbringing and feelings. As someone who struggled with the idea of telling others what to do, the experience empowered me to show the way with clear guidelines. It taught me to be patient while I waited for them to figure it out. It taught me to give the benefit of the doubt and hold in the urge to reprimand when lapses and mistakes happened.

As I look forward to a whole new year with our third

au pair, I can't wait to see how her charming spirit, love, and affection will touch my baby girl's heart and how all of us will grow through the new recipes, places, and stories we will share. Our au pair girls will forever be part of our lives and we can't wait to see their lives expand into exciting and fulfilling adventures as the years pass by.

Thank you so much, Dee, for sharing your family's au pair journey with us! We are sure especially families new to the program will appreciate your helpful advice about what it means to host an au pair.



Marla Liv with the family's current au pair, Charlotte Delacroix from Vermand, France.