

## Karina Kolbe – EurAuPair Au Pair of the Year 2017

By the Caron/Cragg Family from Saint Paul, MN

A little four year old girl knew immediately.

As our jobs became more chaotic, always having someone to watch our daughter Mavis was getting to be a challenge. We had worn grandma and the neighbors thin, and we needed something more stable and reliable. I knew we needed someone that would be a constant, and love Mavis as we did.

Luke, my husband, at first was resistant. He didn't want a live-in nanny, he couldn't imagine how it could work where it felt that we were all an important part of the family and household.

I began searching the au pair websites, Mavis peering over my shoulder at the videos each hopeful au pair had made of driving, holding children, waving from blooming gardens.

But the videos were unimpressive to 4 year old Mavis, she consistently, day after day, wanted to see the profile of Karina, with just pictures and no videos, a well-educated woman from Germany currently working in a child care center in Paris. Her credentials were impressive and Mavis had me convinced. Luke put away his fears as he learned that this is also an exchange program: she's here to learn as much as we are looking for good child care.

And we all leaped, and Karina landed in Minnesota in cold snap.

Formal, maybe a bit stiff, and very, very professional. Perfect.

I did worry that my big personality, and my husband's endless extroversion and our very social child would overwhelm this quiet woman with our Big American Life. But that is exactly part of this experiment.

The first few weeks were part awkward and part blissful excitement,



*Cuddles during tea-time while being at a family cookie baking session.*

with all of us figuring out bathroom schedules and other roommate plans, and the joy of Mavis anticipating her time with Karina, and my husband and I anticipating time we could actually be together without chasing a toddler.

A month later we would test our togetherness as we spent a couple weeks driving a minivan through the Yucatan jungle, seeing pyramids, itching bug bites, swimming and buying spicy gas station candy. Karina was thrown into a huge adventure in Mexico, in tiny towns and sprawling cities, awed by Chichen Itza's magical pyramids, swimming in underground caverns and overcoming her fear and learning to snorkel the reef.

Karina relaxed, and Mavis grew comfortable with the stability in place of the pre-Karina chaos. Karina brought things we just didn't have time for with our schedules – paint, bug homes, and long narratives involving every doll and stuffed toy in the house. Mavis has a special playmate that has helped her develop into a smarter, more creative, more empathetic girl.

We told Karina we expected her to really live in Minnesota, to develop friends and her own community.

She soon was the au pair the others called in times of stress. Before long her network of friends grew beyond just other au pairs. She spends all of her time off camping, doing every Harry Potter event she can find, and of course finding all of the other fun that the city offers. Her St. Paul pride shows often, and her cold tolerance has grown to Minnesota-native worthy.

My husband and I have watched Karina blossom, from someone a little bit timid into someone that's quite fearlessly devouring this culture, seeing and learning as much as she can with the time she has here. We are very, very proud that we could nurture and encourage her in her early adulthood. I think our Big American Life has helped her see there are no limits on anything she wants to do with the rest of her life.

On Thanksgiving, ten months into this experiment, what that little 4 year old knew when she picked Karina's photos finally became clear. After a huge, raucous, silly, full Thanksgiving day, we drove home from grandma's through the

*Continued on Page 2...*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Karina Kolbe – EurAuPair Au Pair of the Year 2017
- Five Wonderful Big Sisters
- EurAuPair Road Trip
- A Year of Meetings in Review
- 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".

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*Karina and her host sister Mavis relax by the ocean.*

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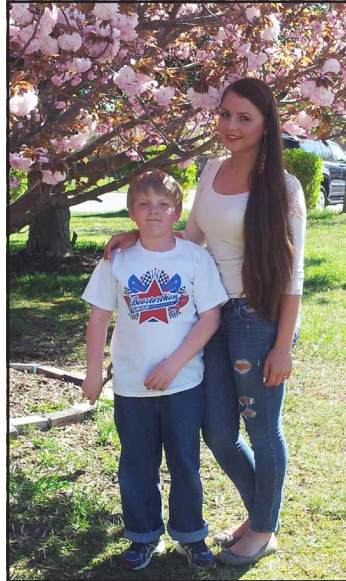
# Five Wonderful Big Sisters

By Brad Evans, Host Family in Alexandria, VA

Already a very busy professional, I became a single Dad just before my son's eighth birthday. It was a huge decision, but after careful consideration I decided to get an au pair through EurAupair. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Getting an au pair means bringing a stranger half way around the world and into your home for an entire year and giving that stranger responsibility over the single most important thing in your world – your child. You will hear some horror stories. There are some au pairs who should not be au pairs. And there are some host families that shouldn't be host families. My philosophy was that if I felt I couldn't trust a potential au pair to behave like an adult, then I shouldn't hire that au pair. And if I could trust the au pair to behave like an adult, then there should be no need for curfews or heavy-handed oversight. Before I offered them the position, I made sure they understood that they needed to hold up their end of the bargain. But, and this is where I think many

families go wrong, I also made sure they understood that I was



A beautiful photo of Patricia from Germany with her host brother.

committed to giving them the best possible home life and cultural exchange I could. I believe that made all the difference.

Now my son is thirteen and we have had five au pairs - and now he has five wonderful big sisters

for the rest of his life. He and I love them all dearly, and they us. They served as my son's tutors, mentors, piano teachers, language teachers and general life coaches in ways that were often impossible for me to provide, and in some ways, for me to even imagine. And I gave them the security, autonomy and the mobility they needed in order to explore their new American world. We travelled widely and often, which was good for my son as well as the au pairs. They asked and I answered thousands of questions about language, culture, politics, food, and life. And my son heard those discussions – between adults, not watered down “for a child's ears”. Through their questions, he learned things about his own culture that would never have occurred to me to mention otherwise. And, perhaps just as important, those five young women are now back in their home countries, and when one of their friends or acquaintances says something incorrect about the US, they have the tools to correct them. Everybody wins.

So think carefully about whether you are really ready to be a host family, hire an au pair that is a good fit for how your family actually lives, commit yourself to meeting the spirit of the arrangement as well as the letter, and let the magic happen. Done right, it's absolutely worth it!



Fun at the river with Au Pairs Janine and Adelina (both from Germany).

Thank you so much, Brad, for sharing your experience with us and for giving such helpful advice to (new) host families. We are glad that you and your son have found new family members for life!



Winter Wonderland with the Evans Family and German Au Pair Angelina.



Snow White (aka Valentina from Colombia) and Batman!

...Continued from Front Page



This summer, Mavis learned how to ride the bike with safety wheels. Karina got her running workout done while chasing her. :)

countryside in the dark, and we all recounted what we were thankful for.

Karina told us that in Germany her family was just her and her mom, but now she realized that this large, laughing, loud American family had really become her family. And it really was something to be thankful for.

At that moment, we all realized Karina had become an irreplaceable member of our family. It hit hard, how much we have become a true family in such a short time, and I might have cried a little bit during that dark car ride (please don't tell Karina her unflappable host mom cried!).

In less than one year, Karina will leave our home. Each day each of us tucks the dread of that upcoming day away.

There's been three of us loving this little 4 year old as she turned 5, growing and becoming a bigger and better person, but the other part of this story is there is an incredible woman that bloomed into her beautiful self at the same time, under the same roof.

Thank you for this beautiful and fun essay about your time with Karina. Congratulations, Karina, for winning this year's Au Pair of the Year Award!!



Little legs got tired at the May Day Parade.

# EurAupair Photos



Indiana Community Counselor Nancy Paschal and her German Au Pairs Wiebke and Sara prepared a typical German meal: Schnitzel, Rotkohl and Kartoffelknödel. Looks delicious!!



West Virginia Community Counselor Michelle Duez and her Au Pair Fairy (China) had a great time putt putt golfing. Fairy had never been before and had a really great time!



The Thompson Family from Wichita, KS shared this adorable Christmas Eve photo of their Au Pair Laura (Colombia) and her host siblings.



Alice Smith, our Omaha, NE Community Counselor, and her crew went bowling. Thanks for sharing this cute picture!



Orange County, CA Community Counselor Laura Piunno and her group of au pairs had lunch at the Irvine Spectrum Center followed by arcade games at Dave & Busters.

# EurAupair Road Trip

By Natalie Kratzer-Gushwa, our Community Counselor in Seattle, WA

Our cultural meeting in October 2016 was a very typical American thing to do: a road trip! Fifteen people and three cars went on the road on Saturday morning, October 29th 2016 at 5:30 am. We started in Seattle and our destination was Florence, OR where we would meet up with an au pair group from Eugene, OR and a former Euraupair au pair who now lives in Eugene as well.

We stopped for breakfast at Starbucks along the way and had sandwiches later for lunch. Then finally we arrived at the cottage right by the water. We got settled, played guitar hero, listened to music, and talked about all kind of stuff. We then decided to go to the beach and watch the sunset – this was such a beautiful and happy moment to enjoy.

After that the group of almost 20 went back to the cottage and we started to get ready for dinner. Typical American food: chicken

burgers, fruit, salad, chips and s'mores for dessert. Meanwhile everybody also dressed up in their Halloween costumes and we started playing Pie Face, which was lots of fun! We played the night away, had great conversations, got to know one another more and made new connections with the group from Eugene, OR.

After a very nice breakfast the next morning we started to pack up and headed out back to WA state. We all agreed on doing such a nice and fun trip sometime soon again, and the Eugene group also wanted to come visit us in Seattle. This trip was exactly what Euraupair is about, connecting the world and making it



At the Halloween Costume Party.

seem smaller than it is!

Thank you so much, Natalie, for organizing this super fun monthly meeting and for writing about it. We love the photos!



We love this EurAupair dessert!



Beautiful photo of the Washington and Oregon au pairs and community counselors.

# A Year of Meetings in Review

By Joana Godinho, Community Counselor in the Washington, D.C. Area

Every year the U.S. receives approximately one million exchange students. As a community counselor I am a cultural broker that helps a small group to adjust to a new country.

My goal: After our au pairs go through the bureaucracy of getting their driver's license, a social security number, opening their bank account, and figuring out how to get around in this town, we move on to the next item - appreciating their host home. I want them to have the time of their lives!

My method: I aim to make the meetings a fun experience. Planning ahead, I schedule most meetings two months in advance, aiming to obtain a goal like fitness or about some cultural aspect. The meetings should also be budget friendly. I find activities the au pairs like by involving them in the decision making process. I also try to negotiate lower rates with organizations by sending an introduction email.

When I hosted the last meeting of the year in December and signed the au pairs' folios, I realized how diverse my meetings were. We did a bit of everything - races, volunteering, we learned about American culture, and had lunch at the same place former President Obama goes to. So I decided to write this article to share with the community what our year looked like!

## JANUARY:

### Brunch at Colloton Family

(Price \$0)

The Colloton Family is a role model family. They welcomed Anna as a member of the family. On this date, they hosted this brunch so they could say goodbye to Pia, their previous au pair, and introduce Anna to family and friends. They were kind enough to allow me to bring the rest of my group to the event.

## FEBRUARY:

### Lunch at Ben Chili's Bowl

(Price \$5+)

President Obama and other VIP guests had lunch at this location. It's located in a historic neighborhood of Washington DC - U Street.

## MARCH:

### Feed Homeless People at Lincoln Park, Washington DC

(Price \$0)

Giving back to the community is something that is part of the US culture and we would like our

au pairs to experience it. (Credits to Community Counselor Anne Krohn for taking the lead on this volunteer opportunity.)



From left to right: Community Counselor Anne Krohn, Anna (Italy), Carmen (Brazil), Marine (France).

## APRIL:

### O Street Mansion at Washington DC

(Price \$10)

April is cultural month. We toured the O Street Mansion and explored the museum and its collection of more than 20,000 paintings, photographs, sculptures, books, artifacts, and music, from all over the globe. Among the 100 rooms we searched for secret doors, signed guitars, memorabilia, and enjoyed the art.

## MAY:

### Color Run - 5k at Gaylord Center, MD

(Price \$40)

Fitness is as important as culture! Living abroad brings some extra pounds. I convinced my girls to run the color run. They had a great time and at the end they said, "Let's do this again next year!" And I might take them on that offer! (The organization took \$5 off, the price above reflects that discount.)



From left to right: Anna (Italy), Community Counselor Joana and Bruna (Brazil).

## JUNE:

### June Meeting

(Price \$0)

This monthly meeting was conducted by Area Coordinator Holly Brown.

## JULY:

### Swimming Pool

(Price \$0)

A hot afternoon in Washington DC requires to get a tan. YES! DC is known for

its tropical weather... and we couldn't resist to have crepes post swimming pool.



From left to right: Community Counselor Joana, Anna (Italy) and Marine (France).

## AUGUST:

### Starbucks

(Price \$5)

Urgh. I don't want to be a Starbucks CC. But here's the silver lining: Starbucks is American!

## SEPTEMBER:

### Super Hero Bar Crawl at Washington DC

(Price \$10)

The girls dressed up and we had a social drink in some bars in DC.

## OCTOBER:

### Hold US Flags at the MCM, volunteer with Wear Blue

(Price \$0)

One American quirk that I love is to have flags everywhere. Even if we want to forget where we live, we can't. Americans are very protective when it comes to their flag - can't touch the floor, needs to be held high and free... So we volunteered with Wear Blue, a veterans non-profit organization, to hold US flags in honor of those who served this great country. We learned more about the flag etiquette.



Au pairs and Joana volunteer holding US flags at the Marine Corps Marathon.

## NOVEMBER:

### NYC Marathon - Volunteer NYC, NY

(Price \$0)

My girls were more excited than I, and when I offered the possibility to volunteer, they immediately accepted. There was a total of 1000 au pairs from ALL over the states. I offered a RT bus ticket and the girls did

leg work and found free lodging at a monastery. They described this event as exhausting (60,000+ thirsty runners stopped by their mile) and life changing. Let me make you envious, they gave water to elite runners and famous people. Ah!



From left to right: Bruna (Brazil), Anna (Italy) and Community Counselor Joana. Yes, I can, NYC!

## DECEMBER:

### Brunch with gift exchange, Gatsby's Tavern

(Price \$14)

The founders of the American Independence had lunch at this restaurant. And if you haven't visited it, you are missing out. I tagged along with Community Counselor Anne Krohn; we hosted brunch and did some Secret Santa gift exchange. (The restaurant is au pair budget friendly, brunch starts at \$7.)

If you are reading this and would like to be part of my meetings, please email me - whether you are a community counselor or an au pair who just wants to make new friends. We will make room for you.

I would like to dedicate this article to my AMAZING 2016 AU PAIRS: Bruna D'Avila (Brazil) and Anna Rossi (Italy) who always want to do fun things. This would not be possible without them. One last note, Bruna and Anna recently surprised me by signing-up for the Rock and Roll half marathon in D.C. and challenged me to join them. Being a runner myself, I think I have motivated them into the world of fitness!

The planning for the 2017 meetings is still in the works. In addition to Anna and Bruna, I recently got two au pairs - Tiphaine (France) and Vittoria (Italy). I am sure they will have a great time too. Meetings can be fun!

THANK YOU, Joana, for this wonderful article and the great photos - it was a lot of fun to "join" your 2016 meetings! Thank you for coming up with such exciting ideas for the monthly get-togethers.