



IAPA Au Pair of the Year Award 2007



NOMINATION FORM

Host Family

Name of host family member submitting nomination: Kati & George Spaniak

Name/s and age/s of other family members: Lisa- 5 ½, Leia – 4, Ava – 2 ½

Address: Illinois, United States.....

IAPA Member

Name of IAPA Member Agency (please circle: Sending/**Receiving**): EurAuPair

Country: United States.....

Au Pair

Name of au pair: Emilie Terryn.....

Nationality of au pair: French

Age of au pair: 21.....

Start date of au pair: 9/22/2006.....

Finish date of au pair (if applicable): 9/2007





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"I love you already!" September 21, 2006.

Oh my God. What have we done?? We haven't even met this girl yet, and she is already writing to us telling us she loves us?? What if we can't stand her? What if our girls hate her? What if? What if?

But what if we love her too and she changes our life?

George and I had been going back and forth on whether or not to hire an au pair to live with us and our three girls, Lisa, 5, Leia, 3 and Ava, 2. Did we really want someone to live with us? How would it be having a foreigner in our house? We don't really have the same political views...do we? Do Europeans even LIKE Americans?

Finally, after months of thought and debate, we decided that we desperately needed more help than a babysitter could provide. In addition, we knew that financially, it made more sense than a full-time nanny.

We were ready.

September 22, 2006: We went to the airport at 3:00 pm on a Friday to pick up Emilie Terryn, our new au pair from France. We made signs and took the camera and all five of us piled into the minivan. 4:00 pm came and went, and so did the thunderstorms and tornado. 5 pm turned into 6 and 7 and 8 and 9 and 10. Finally, we were told that Emilie was going to be on the 10:30 pm flight. Our three girls were exhausted. The signs were torn, and I was already feeling responsible for another daughter. So weakly, I encouraged our girls to stand up and hold their signs at the bottom of the stairs. "Please, jump up and down like you were doing earlier," I pleaded. I just wanted Emilie to feel welcome.

She was coming down the escalator. We slowly saw her feet, then her bag, and then her smile. She was here. We welcomed her with open arms, and all of our apprehension followed the thunderstorm out of Chicago that night.

The next few days were fun, and nerve-wracking, interesting and eye-opening. We had to explain to Emilie, much to her surprise, that we didn't all carry guns. We also had to try and understand what her favorite food was...celery root? What in the world is that? We had conversations about what the French think of us and what we think of the French... very tactfully... of course. But the two words that were frequently used were "fat" and "snotty." By the way, both terms were agreed to by both parties.

It was only about day three when George and I were lying in bed talking about the day and how it went with Emilie. I was hesitant to talk to George about something, but I knew that it was something that he would probably agree with. "You know, I am already feeling that when Emilie leaves, it is going to be traumatic for our family." The way the girls had bonded with her, the respect she gave to us and our household, the loving discipline she bestowed on the children was something that we felt was magical. We knew that Emilie was right. We loved her already.

The days quickly turned into months. Emilie is truly my friend. How can that be? A 21-year old and a 35-year old from other countries can be friends? I would confide in her as though I had known her my whole life and it had only been three months.

We have spent countless hours talking about our lives and the girls. She has brought a new way of



feeding my children vegetables. Who am I kidding...a 'new' way would signify that there was an 'old' way. Healthy foods and vegetables are now an accepted part of every meal. She has helped me control the 'American' way of eating and introduced the 'French' way of eating.



When I had the flu for a whole week before Christmas, she did everything she needed to without being asked. I am sure she worked more than her 45 hours that week. She just stepped in and made dinner for the girls, cleaned up and got them ready for bed. I remember sitting on the couch almost comatose thanking her for her extra efforts. She looked at me while she was cleaning a pot and said, "When you told me about this job, you told me that we were going to be a team. The way I see it is that one member of the team is down, and I am just doing what I am supposed to do."

The holidays were tiring and draining. I had put every effort into making it a great Christmas for everyone. And I really felt "finished." Emilie saw that. She knew I needed a break, and she gave us a precious gift.

Our Christmas gift was a hand-written letter from her explaining her experience in America, similar to what I have written here. She made a collage with pictures of me and George and explained what she truly admired and loved about us. She knows our family better than anyone, and she recognized and acknowledged the work we are putting into making this a strong family. She sees that everything we do is for our children, and it was a wonderful gift to have someone recognize and support us.

As her gift to us, she had booked a weekend away at a hotel in a neighboring town. She said she was going to take care of the girls (with help from my parents). We were not to worry about anything. She wrote, "A French proverb says: 'Quand on aime on ne compte pas' Don't ask me how much it cost me, just say 'thank you.'"

What could we say? She had seen that we were just keeping our heads above water, and she gave us the gift of time. Not only that, she had personally driven to many different hotels in the area to make sure it was up to her standards. She checked out all of the rooms, and made sure the amenities were just what we needed.

This type of gift goes beyond what a family member or friend would give. This was something Emilie knew we desperately needed, and she did everything to make sure she could give it to us.

There is a secret world of parenthood that no one knows about until they are in it. How can you explain to anyone how tired and happy, scared and frustrated you are and have them understand? Emilie understands. She understood. She gave us her time, her support and her love.

So I am not sure what "Au Pair of the Year" is supposed to mean. Does it mean that the parents have the ability to work more? Does it mean that the Au Pair is an exceptional student? Does it mean that the children are safe and comfortable with her? I am not sure what it is supposed to mean. All I know, that the connection that we have with Emilie really only comes once in a lifetime. She is more than an Au Pair to us. She is truly our family. And we know that the day she leaves will be a traumatic moment in our lives. That is not an understatement. Emilie has changed our lives. I guess that that is my definition of "Au Pair of the Year." Which Au Pair has made such an impression on her host family's life the most so that they will never be the same without her?

If that is the definition, then Emilie Terryn is Au Pair of the Year.

Respectfully submitted,

Kati Spaniak (*and family-George, Lisa, Leia & Ava*)