



IAPA Au Pair of the Year Award 2008 Finalist



Au Pair

Name of au pair: Linda Falter.....

Nationality of au pair: German.....

Age of au pair: 22 years.....

Start date of au pair placement: June/05/2006.....

Finish date of au pair placement (if applicable)*: June/05/2008.....

* Contact details if you are no longer with your host family after 01 March 2008

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Telephone:

Email:.....

I confirm that I will be able to attend the IAPA 14th Annual Conference, 26—28 March 2008, in The Hague, The Netherlands. If I am still placed with my Host Family during these dates I confirm that I have received the necessary permission from my Host Family to attend the Conference. (please tick).

Host Family

Name of host family: Tiscareno-Sato

Address: United States

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Telephone:.....

Email:.....

IAPA Member

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

Cultural Care Au Pair

Country: United States.....



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Braille, Skiing, SCUBA, Webcams and More: My Time in the USA as an Au Pair

The Beginning

My life in the US didn't start like I imagined it back in Germany. I was the first Au Pair for my first host family. Soon after I arrived in California, they discovered they didn't want another person living in their house so I had to suddenly leave. My LCC was very supportive and found two new families for me to choose from. One of them is my current family and I loved them very much from the first time I met them. Here I feel loved, welcomed and supported. I think this is how an exchange student feels away from home when living with another family for a period of time. I'm so happy that my current family had trouble with their Au Pair at the same time I had to leave my first family-- otherwise we wouldn't have met and that would have been a real loss for me.

New Baby

There are so many fantastic things that happened in my time here in the US. But I think the most wonderful thing was the birth of Kiyoshi my youngest host-child. My host-family allowed me to share the joy of a newborn baby after only five hours after birth. I can't imagine this family without this cute little surprise boy.

Blindness and Braille

The thing that "scared" me the most at first is that my oldest host-child, Milagro, is visually impaired. I had never worked with a visually-impaired child before so I was very nervous about it. Now, choosing this family helped me to find my goal in my education as a teacher – I want to become a teacher for children with special needs.

Thanks to my family, I'm able to meet people that work in the field. I was allowed to go with them to a conference about visual impairments and the education of students who are blind and get a closer inside of this field as well. I learned Braille so I can read books with Milagro and write about things we are doing or have done. I have completed online courses through the Hadley School for the Blind so I can best help her as she learns to read Braille.

Skiing and SCUBA

My host-family invited me to accompany them on vacations with them and so I was allowed to see more of the US and spend more time with them and just have fun with them together. On one of our trips they paid for a ski class and I'm very thankful for that because I have a lot of fun skiing. Now I'm more into my newest hobby – SCUBA diving. I recently completed my courses and am now a certified SCUBA diver! My host –family is very supportive in every way in everything I do and that's the best thing and that's why I love them so much!

The cutest thing about diving is the time after I'm back from my weekend trips and Milagro knows I'm home. The first thing she want to do is talk to me about 'swimming under the *agua* (water in Spanish)' and playing with the 'breeze'- she loves to feel the air coming out of the Regulator when you 'push the button'! And Kotomi, the three year-old middle child, starts to enjoy my dive gear, too.



Kotomi loves to read the German story about a little bee named Maya who goes on adventures with her friends. I have given her several books in German as gifts, some of them with music. One day I picked her up from preschool and she asked me if her peer named Maya is the character of the story – that was so cute and shows how much imagination she has.



Surprises in Germany

Until today, I can't believe what my host-family did for me in November 2006. My dad celebrated his 50th birthday that year and I thought I could handle not being there with him to celebrate. In the end I couldn't handle it. My host family gave me the morning of my dad's birthday off so we could talk online. It was okay during the conference but after I finished, my world broke apart and I got so homesick. After talking to my host-mom, she allowed me to fly to Germany the very next day, and even allowed me to stay there for a week. That was the most incredible thing ever! I was able to surprise my dad for his big party and actually everybody else was very surprised seeing me in Germany. We had a great time. My host mom taught me a very important lesson with this. She thanked me for telling her how important this was to me and said, "Linda, always ask for what you want. If you don't ask the question, the answer is always no."

Impacting Others, Learning About Myself

My parents came to visit me because they wanted to get to know my host-family which I love very much and I am pretty sure they do to otherwise they wouldn't have nominated me for this award. It was a very interesting time for me to have both my families together in one place and I was surprised how well they could communicate even if my parents don't speak any English or only a little bit.

Since I have been here I really realize how much impact one decision of mine has to the people around me. My parents flew for the first time around the world and everybody else in my community in Germany is getting more into talking over the Internet and using webcams just so we can stay connected! My parents invited my host-family to visit us in Germany sometime so we can show them our culture and I'm pretty sure we will stay in contact for a very long time.

Being away from your familiar surroundings can be hard but it is easier if there is someone who shows you that they love you and support you. I am very lucky because I found the perfect family to show and teach me about life in a different culture and I am very lucky in another way: I also have the opportunity to see inside two more cultures besides the American – the Japanese and the Mexican. I love to teach and show them things we do in my culture.

I learned so much about myself since I'm here in the US. I learned that I can stay longer away from my family in Germany than only two weeks – that is probably only because I found a second family here that I love very much. I found out in what direction I want my job to go – the field of teaching children with special needs. I learned Braille, skiing, and SCUBA diving, all things that I probably wouldn't have figured out or experienced back in Germany.

I thank my LCC that she found this family for me and the Au Pair before me who decided to leave the family at the right time so that I could take her spot and of course my host-family for supporting me and giving me the feeling of being loved as one of their own.

Linda Falter