

Essay Alisson Haro: How the Au Pair experience changed my life

What does it mean to learn new things? It can be defined in different elements, and I personally must thank life for giving me the opportunity to be an au pair. It helped me to learn to value my family, meet wonderful people who are now my second family, and above all gave me knowledge that I am a warrior; everything that is proposed to me to fulfill, it will take time, but with effort everything will happen!

It all started with a desire to venture out to see a new country, to be able to travel, to get to know a new culture and, in short, all the good things that traveling offers you. I started to gather my documents which took me a longer time than expected. The process took two long years - the first year the director of the school I worked at asked me to continue to help her with a particular class, the second year the pandemic arrived. At that moment, I felt I had given up my dream! In three more months I would be 27 years old, and I no longer had time to apply for the trip. However, thanks to my agency I was finally able to complete all the steps so that the families could see me, and from there the au pair journey began.

I quickly had several matches on my profile, but none of them materialized. Restlessness was consuming me, and I was not sure what would happen to my future. My family did not know anything about the process this time, because when it all started I told everyone that I was leaving. When hour after hour my trip did not arrive, everyone continued to bother me saying that my trip was cut short, and that it was a lie - things that lowered my self-esteem more and more! I made the decision to not let anyone in my family know how the search was carrying on, so I could keep personally focused on my challenge. I continued with the process, and one day I unexpectedly saw in my mailbox a message from David, my host Dad. It was on a Friday - I replied very gladly, and we were able to talk a little more that day via chat, exchanging numbers and agreeing to have an interview on Tuesday to meet the little ones. I spoke with the children and I loved the 'click' we had from the first moment. By the end of our appointment, we had agreed that he would talk with his wife Kaitie and have an answer if they wanted me to stay or not! The next day I received the good news and that they would start to do the corresponding paperwork to live with them. In that moment my world stopped and only my heart exploded with happiness. I quickly made the appointment for the visa and started to gather more documents, and soon had everything ready to go. Now, it was time to tell my parents what was happening. I told them everything that had happened during all those weeks and that in a few days I would leave their side. They were very happy to support me in everything and all the love I received from my whole family was beautiful since I had the opportunity to say goodbye to each of them. I asked for the blessing of the older adults in my family, and said goodbye with huge hugs.

The day of my trip arrived, everything was ready. David, Kaitie, Levin, Vaughn, Clara (not yet Josie!) greeted me with a beautiful poster made by them, a divine bouquet of roses and - most importantly - with arms wide open. From the day I arrived until today, I cannot manage to thank them for everything I have learned! Every day there are new things and every day I feel more like a

family. Each one of them has a beautiful personality. I fall in love with this family more and more as I discover new things about them every day!

David is very kind and prepares the best dinners in the world, and he has delighted us all with his dishes. Kaitie is wonderful, loving and thoughtful. She makes each one of us feel loved in the family. Levin is very original and funny; the one who dances the best among all of us. Vaughn is very sweet, helpful, and loves to play his superhero games with me. Clara is now my best friend and the funniest in the family. She is my biggest companion and I love how I become like a little girl to be able to play with her! Josie (who came after I arrived) is my beloved little girl, who steals my daily sighs and makes me feel tender every time I see her. Mary is David's mother with whom I had the honor of meeting and establishing a loving relationship. I also admire her a lot and she takes up a giant place in my heart. Of course, there is also the playful dog Pippa who accompanies me in the morning for a run, and the nice cat Gimli who loves to hang out in the window of my room. This family is beautiful, and yes, I arrived in a time when the Horn family was going through hard times - however, every minute I saw how these parents helped bring their children forward, no matter how hard the storm hit, they were always there with a smile for them. And yes, I went through the family's loss as well- David's dad Papaw passed away a day after his birthday. The whole family including me was sad, but thanks to that I was able to understand that parents are the greatest treasure we have. That day, I ran to call my dad to remind him how much I love him. I could feel the pain of losing a father and I really admire David for having all the strength to stand up and take care of his family. Time passed and even though we were sad for what happened, November would bring us a surprise - my precious little Josie! Kaitie had been pregnant since I arrived, and everything was planned so that Josie could be a Christmas gift but, as Kaitie says, she ended up being our Turkey gift! It was incredible to see how things happened from one moment to the next: Kaitie began to feel bad and David took her to the hospital on a Sunday. I wasn't working, but as I always say, I am always there for them! So I stayed at home taking care of my three little ones and Josie was born. She was a premature baby who had to spend 14 days in the NICU. During all that time Kaitie and David were star parents, because they drew strength from where they did not have. The Horn family is a whole team and I am very proud of them because nothing has stopped them: not covid-19, not pre-eclampsia, not an unfortunate death. My heart is so grateful not only for making me love kittens, or for showing me the delicious dinners of America, or for giving me such fun moments every day, but also for teaching me that life has so much to offer - thanks to the Horn family for everything.

How did my life change being an Au pair?

In every possible way, to start with myself! I had to spend two years to receive an answer, so it changed me in the way I see time. It's not *when* I want it, it is when it *has to be given*. It has helped me not to give up and continue with my dream despite any circumstance, it has helped me to value much more what I have now living in the present. Above all other things, it helped me to unite more with God and be more resilient with myself. Being an au pair goes beyond traveling or getting to know a new country, being an au pair means taking care of the family and always being there for them! I love the Horn family and I love my au pair adventure.