

Au Pair of the Year Award 2022 - Essay by Rani Bonnarens

A jump into the unknown; that's pretty much how my au pair life started, not knowing that this was going to be the best time of my life. Since I was little, I knew I was going to work with kids when I grew up. But before I had to start my career, I wanted a new and refreshing life; but a life where I still could work with kids. From the moment I learned about the au pair program, I knew that this was what I wanted to do. I've been in the United States now for 6 months and although I've learned a lot about interacting with kids, I also learned even more about myself. It's been an incredible experience.

The au pair life starts with finding a family. For me, this was the scariest moment of all. From the first moment I called my host family, I knew that they were the ones. Everything went so smoothly, even though I was very nervous. After the call, we kept in touch by texting. Shortly after a second call, we matched! I was so excited to meet them in real life. Immediately I felt like a part of their family. My youngest host kid told me recently that I'm not a 'Bonnarens' anymore (which is my last name) but I'm a 'Matthews' now. They surprised me with a Disneyworld trip on the 3rd day I was in the United States! I can't even express how grateful I am to them. We have an ideal relationship based on solid and open communication. If there is something going on, I can just tell them and nothing is too much for them. They're really the best host family I could imagine. For me personally, this is the most important reason why my au pair experience is so wonderful.

In the 6 months I've been here, I have done so many things! First of all, I met some amazing people: Americans and au pairs. I got my education credits for the au pair program during a weekend course in Texas, certainly one of my best memories from my au pair year. I met friends for life. I've visited five US states so far and so many more are planned! This is a great benefit the au pair program gives me. It's a perfect combination of working, traveling, improving in a new language, making friends and learning about another culture. Learning more about raising kids and how to teach them new skills and values has also been a big benefit for me.

In college, I worked with kids and interacted with them as a teacher, but living in a family with four host kids has changed my perspective and given me the chance to see being a child caregiver in a new light. Sometimes four kids can be a challenge, especially when one of them is a teenager. I remember myself being a teenager, but I've never had to take care of one. It's really different than taking care of the seven years old twins or my eleven years old host kid. I've learned a lot since I arrived, but sometimes there are days where I don't know what to do or don't know how to fix a problem. I am not scared to try something out and see if that works. If it doesn't, my host parents are always there to help me. We try to find solutions together and listen to each other's perspective. I always look forward to the special moments I have with the kids. It can be busy, but it's always a lot of fun. It's never quiet and boring! We do lots of hiking, going to the playground, baking, rollerblading, arts and crafts and many more things. The twins' absolute favorite moment of the day is snuggle time before they go to bed. They pretty much refuse to let me go sleep in my own bed because they want me to stay with them.

All of this, every good and bad moment, my host family, my new friends and my improvement in English has made me the happiest version of myself. I would recommend the au pair life to every young adult, female or male, because this is really a fantastic experience.