



-Ana Elisa Miranda-

## About

Hello everyone! I'm Ana Elisa and I'm Brazilian. I have been an Au Pair twice: 18 months in the USA and 12 months in Belgium. This experience changed my life completely and brought me to where and who I am today. I had never travelled much, so every little contact with the new excited, scared and taught me some. It was a great adventure and act of courage and faith. I grew so much more independent, resourceful, self-confident and strong.

I am not an Au Pair anymore, but it still resonates deeply with me and that's why I love sharing my story and connecting with like-minded people. I cherish all the memories I have from those times and writing this book is a way to honor them and keep them alive. I believe in the power of personal life stories - they bring true inspiration and wisdom that we can use to get up and go after our dreams.



## *I had a dream*

Growing up in a small town, I always felt I was different and didn't belong. I wanted to leave, to break free of the limitations. I had an urge to travel and see the world, meet new and interesting people, do exciting things and grow.

I used to hear about interchange programs and think I would never be able to afford them. A four-week English conversation course in London? Forget it! Three months working at Disneyland? Still couldn't afford it. Being an Au Pair? Hmm... euh... kids... euh... one year away... euh...what if...

### **Why?**

The Au Pair program was by far the most affordable for me. Besides, I met all the **requirements:**

- Be between 18 and 26 years old;
- Have a driver's license;
- Have experience working with children (at least 200 hours);
- Proficient English;
- Clear criminal background check;
- Secondary school.

I had graduated from University and had a job as an English teacher. I could pay all the fees myself!

Besides, I would have a **house** to live in for free, **food**, some **education**, a weekly **stipend** and a **whole year of travel and fun!** Yaaaay! I can do this!

...

## Or can I?

### Scary thing

Being thrown out of your comfort zone is never easy. I think I had never been so scared in my life. I was about to leave my home to live with strangers. What if they were crazy? What if it didn't work and I ended up alone on the streets? Or worse? (Oh, the drama!) What if the children hated me? What if I realized it was a big mistake?

Oh, fear makes you so silly!

Deep down I knew for sure that I wanted to do it. I had to start thinking straight.

So:

- I forced myself to only **focus on the good things** I expected from it: travelling, seeing beautiful places, making new friends, improving my English, having fun, learning new things, etc.
- I talked to friends about it. I got excited. When asked if I was scared, I said "No, I'm not. Everything will be alright". And I believed it.
- I read **other Au Pairs' blogs** and connected on social media. It was good to get a good sense of what was ahead of me. I just had to be careful not to be pulled down by the negative comments and whining. You have to know how to filter information and opinions. I think most of the unhappy Au Pairs were unfortunate with their match – maybe they didn't clear out all their doubts before or maybe the families turned out to be different after they moved in. Sometimes it's lack of communication that creates

resentment. Nothing is always roses and rainbows, but it doesn't have to be that bad. If you're not happy, quit, move. If you choose to stay, do your best to make it a good experience.

- I wrote on my diary and blog. Having that time with myself and putting the words on paper helped me organize my thoughts and feelings.
- When I thought about how much I would miss my family and friends, I told myself that time goes fast and I would soon be back home.

Simple as that. I stood by my dream. I was gentle to myself, adjusting to a more positive mindset. I was still anxious but I dealt with it.

## Smart packing

How do you pack when you're leaving for at least a year, to a country where the seasons are different, you have luggage weight limit and you **absolutely need everything you own?**

Here is the secret many people fail to understand: *you do not need everything you own.*

Ten pairs of shoes? Start with a pair of sports sneakers, a pair of warm boots, a pair of flip flops and a pair of night shoes (basic black high heels, for example). Maybe a pair of ballerina shoes. That's all you need. Clothes: take a **couple** of your best jeans, shirts, underwear, socks, dresses. Focus on the season. I left in February so I had to pack coats, pullovers and boots. Most of my shorts and T-shirts I passed on to my sister or to charity.

The advice is simple: **detachment**. It's only stuff. You can buy new stuff. You're not going to the middle of the desert or jungle. Don't pack things you can buy once you're there (hair drier, nail kit, cosmetics, etc). What about the stuff you

only find in your country and nowhere else? You can live without them for a while, dear. Let go!

My personal packing tips (nothing magical, just what I did every time I moved countries -five times! - and it worked wonderfully):

- I never pack last minute;
- I took everything down from my closet and went through them once. I set aside the **best/newest/favorite** pieces that I would definitely wear;
- I started **giving things away** (the ones I hadn't used in months and the ones I was not sure would be useful where I was going).
- I brought the suitcases in my room a couple of weeks in advance so I could start putting things in and having a better notion of the space I had.
- I **organized what was going to stay home** (books, collections, pictures, souvenirs, CDs, etc) and asked someone to take good care of them.
- Finally, I took everything down again and decided what was really going in. I like to roll T-shirts and other soft clothing; fold jeans; put shoes on the sides, with socks in them. I bring one toilet case with essentials only and one small bag of accessories and basic make-up. In my carry on I pack my electronics and chargers, documents and money, a change of clothes, a jacket and a book.
- I **weighed** my luggage. I didn't want any surprises at check-in. Luckily, even when the suitcases were full, they were within the weight limit.

*Voilà!* It doesn't have to be a nightmare but you really have to be ready to let things go. When I first packed to go to the US, I took the opportunity to **not only clear out my closet, but my life**. I knew things would never be the same

and I was going to re-invent myself. So I went through all my stuff, read all the letters, notebooks, cards, messages and then I **burned** everything. Really. It was a powerful ritual. I read it all, locked it safely in my heart and let it go.

I managed to go to the US with one suitcase and one carry-on.

I came to Belgium with two suitcases, because I didn't feel like spending money on winter stuff that I already had. That shit takes space!

**A note on \*shopping\*** - It's much, much easier to **resist** all the sales, outlets and there-is-nothing-to-do-so-let's-go-to-the-mall than to be forced to 1. Get rid of your precious stuff, 2. Ship a fridge-sized box of stuff (which might take months

to arrive, if ever. Plus, that's just ridiculous.), 3. Pay extra luggage fees.



I know it's easy for me to say – I'm not a big shopper. I don't enjoy it and I usually only buy what I really need. Especially abroad, I always thought twice – or more – before buying anything. If it's heavy, if it's big, if I can find it back home, if it might break on the way, etc. Also, why buy useless shit when I can **use my dear money to travel, go out, visit museums, parks, concerts, games, eat, drink, party?**

## *Host family*

I like to say that I was very lucky with my two host families. I didn't search much and yet I found the perfect matches for me. The crucial facts were:

- I had a **clear idea of what I wanted**. I wanted to live close to a city, not totally isolated. I wanted to have access to a car or easy public transportation. I wanted to care for children who went to school so I could have more time to myself. I didn't want to care for more than three children.
- I was **flexible, easy and honest** on my profile.
- I **asked all possible questions** during the interview and followed up with e-mails before we agreed on the match.

*A perfect family for me might not be for the next Au Pair.*

You really have to find what works for you. The host family will be part of your life forever, you got to choose well.

*The keys to success here are respect, flexibility and communication. From all parts.*

Expectations, duties, schedules, free time, privacy, everything has to be talked over and made clear.

Don't judge the way they live their lives or raise their children. It doesn't concern you. Do your best in facilitating their routine and keeping the kids happy and safe. **That's** your job.

Trust your **gut feeling**. If a family doesn't feel right, cordially deny it. Don't rush the choice. Take your time, there are plenty of families around and you'll find yours.

I had a good feeling about both my families and I had a great stay with them. If I hadn't felt that certainty, I wouldn't have chosen them just because I was in a hurry to go abroad.

## Nobody said it was easy

It's said that adaptation takes around three months. I don't remember exactly how long it took me, but I remember well how I felt: **lonely**. I had stripped myself from everything that was familiar to me: home, family, friends, job, food, weather, routine, culture, language. And it was winter. I didn't feel like going out or doing anything else but reading or watching TV in my room. I hadn't bought my laptop yet, so I couldn't be online a lot. I didn't know many people. The beginning was blue.

I gave myself the time to be alone and quiet. I knew I needed to process a lot of changes. But after some time I decided to take action, put some decent clothes on, move my butt and connect with people. Go out. Have fun. After all, that was the reason I was there.

- I connected with Au Pairs in the area via **social media**;
- We arranged **meet-ups**: coffee, museums, city tours, parks, gym, etc.
- I went to my **cluster meetings**. They were actually fun! Self-defense class, snow tubing, S'mores, mini-golf, dinner, secret Santa + food from all our countries, etc.

- I started going to a Christian **youth group** on Sunday nights. It was great to **meet locals** and find spiritual **comfort and guidance**.
- I started taking **classes**. My English was good enough, so I took Spanish, French, Fiction Writing...
- In Belgium I started hanging out at a **Youth House**. They had lots of fun events (Disco Night, Cuban Night, 50's night, movie nights, rock concerts, talent show, ice skating, bar hopping, etc) and it was a cozy place.
- We **partied!**
- We **travelled!**

A little bit of solitude is an amazing gift. You do need time with yourself, especially because you care for children and that can be energy consuming. However, too much loneliness can only bring you down. Shake it off and go be awesome!

## Homesickness + Culture Shock

Missing your loved ones is one of the hardest parts. It doesn't go away. You don't get used to it.

There will be moments when all you think about is how great home was, how good your mom's food is and how comfy your own bed would be right now. You will cry and everything will lose its charm. You'll want to quit and go home. A few months after I arrived, I was sure a year would be more than enough. I had a hard time dealing with homesickness and cultural differences. I started comparing too much and thinking that in Brazil things weren't so bad after all.

I learned to deal with those feelings and to see things clearly and I ended up extending my stay for another 6 months. When I missed home, I let the feeling come and take its course. You eventually get busy with other thoughts. I often Skyped with my family and friends. I met people from Brazil. We spoke Portuguese. I found Brazilian restaurants and grocery stores. I went to concerts and to Brazilian Day in NYC. All that helped me stay in touch with my roots.

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The way people behaved, talked to each other, dressed and many other little things came as a surprise to me. Sometimes I found myself comparing too much and judging. Other times I felt like a stranger who shouldn't be there.

After a while I learned to be more open-minded, flexible and to just accept the differences as they are: neither right nor wrong, just different.

Culture shock doesn't really express the experience I had with the different. Nothing really shocked me. On a broad view, our values, beliefs, habits and behaviors were quite similar. The new was easy to understand and even adapt.

### *Long winters*

It snowed on my second day in the US. A lot. I remember being in the training room, looking out the windows for hours, **enchanted by the falling snow**. Everything was so beautiful and white outside and oh, it was **cold!** When we had a break from classes we rushed outside to take pictures but couldn't stand five minutes of the freezing wind. I didn't have proper boots and the snow melted and soaked my feet. My ears hurt. My nose hurt. I couldn't feel my toes.

It was a big shock for me and I imagine for the other South American people as well. The coldest temperatures in my hometown are never close to zero Celsius. I didn't have good winter clothes, so I had to wear many, many layers...

The worse thing about winter is that it takes so damn long. By the end of April I was sick and tired of wearing the same heavy clothes and boots and of being so pale. The days were short and I had no energy. I didn't feel like getting out of the house.

Eventually, the seasons passed beautifully! The way they don't in Brazil. I was amazed by the change in landscape, mood and fashion. I enjoyed spring, summer and fall the best I could and prepared myself for another winter. I didn't want to be sad and stuck at home. Even though the sun didn't shine much, I had to bring some warmth into my life.

Although you might never get used to the long, cold, dark winters, you can try:

- Getting proper jackets and boots. They might be a little expensive, but it's worth it and they normally last long.
- Keep warm inside with soup, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, hugs, etc.
- Go out anyways! Face the cold. Get some human warmth.
- Find a way to have winter fun: skiing, ice skating, snow tubing, sliding, building igloos, snowmen, snowball fight, whatever.  
Have a laugh!



Food, food, food!



Ooh, the challenge of getting used to new flavors! New seasoning, ingredients, ways to prepare and serve food. New concepts of what a meal is. I learned to appreciate so many new things and at the same time I missed my home food so much. You can't find it anywhere in the world.

So, first impressions:

- During the training week in NY we suffered with the differences. Colorful cereal and scrambled eggs for breakfast instead of my usual coffee with milk, bread with butter or fresh biscuits and cakes.
- My rice, beans, meat and vegetables were replaced by sandwiches for lunch.
- Dinner was pizza or burger with fries. Back home, it would be a version of what I had for lunch or a soup or sometimes tea and biscuits.

The food in the USA lacked flavor, seasoning and personality. It was too simple and shallow for my taste.

I have to admit that I got used to it. I wasn't expected to cook complicated meals and I didn't want to impose my dishes on the family. I only prepared what the kids usually ate: chicken nuggets, hot dogs, simple pasta, mashed potatoes, rice, grilled chicken. In the beginning I bought beans and tried to eat Brazilian-style but then I got lazy and started eating frozen meals for one.

However, I discovered different cuisines: Mexican, Chinese and Italian, among others. Their flavors were new to me and I embraced them. Burritos, quesadillas,

fried rice, dumplings, rolls! I also liked the American diners: fried mozzarella, spicy chicken wings, fries, sandwiches, soups, chips + dips.

Belgium was a different story. It's where I re-learned to appreciate real good stuff – fresh, healthy, homemade food. I didn't have to cook often and they prepared delicious dishes: baked salmon, roasted meat, steamed veggies (some of them from their own garden), homemade Bolognese sauce, mashed potatoes with leeks, soups and so much more. I learned to eat spinach, broccoli and things like that.

Oh, and the strangest things (before you try them)! Bread with butter and chocolate sprinkles; Cheese with mustard; Fries with mayonnaise; Bread + Honey + Melted cheese + grapes; Pancakes + bacon and more.

Of course all the gastronomic indulgence led to...

## *weight gain*

Before I went to the USA many people advised me to be careful and watch my weight. It's like there was something in the air that made people bloat in record time. Exchange students would put on 15 kilos in 6 months; Au Pairs would gain 20 kilos on their first year. I thought, "Whatever, I'm not getting fat that fast". At that time, in my early twenties, I could eat whatever I wanted and keep my skinny figure (average of 60kg). I even thought that if I gained a few kilos I would look better.

Even though my eating habits weren't very healthy – lots of frozen meals, fast food and snacks, I did manage to keep fit for the first year, going on regular walks, doing some yoga and joining the gym later on. However, the last few months there were crazy. We went out for drinks more often. We enjoyed every opportunity to hang out (read: diners, Taco Bell, TGIF, Starbucks or Subway) and I started "comfort eating". I was very nervous about my return and I ate like

a glutton. Why can't we crave a nice bowl of fruit salad or a carrot? Like many women, I craved sugar and the fridge and pantry were fully stocked with ice creams, cookies and treats. Oh, did I mention I cancelled my gym membership?

I started picking up weight and thought, "Ok, once I'm home I'll eat better and healthier food and I'll exercise everyday". Ha, wasn't I wrong... Coming home I wanted to eat everything I missed and haven't had in more than a year. My dad would always ask me what I felt like eating and prepared it especially for me. So there was a period of "Oh, dear soul food, I've missed you so much!"

I am not sure, but I think I was around 8kg sexier by then. People noticed and people commented. Now, here is something I truly believe in and don't understand why many people fail to do: if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything. Why do people have to go and state the obvious (of course I know I gained weight, you don't have to tell me!)? Some people were straight up rude and instead of greeting me cheerfully after not seeing me for 18 months, "You've gained weight!" was the first thing out of their mouths. That brought me back to my teens, when I suffered with a flat chest and a bad case of acne. My self-esteem faced some challenges! I would smile, mumble something about "American food", change subject and resent it later. I was so tired of it I thought I could punch the next person who made a remark. Instead, I learned to ignore.

To be fair, not all American families eat the same way. I hate judging by stereotypes and I'm not here to enforce one. There are different people everywhere in the world. Some like junk food and frozen meals, some eat healthy, some are vegetarian, some are kosher, etc. My eating habits and weight gain are strictly related to my personal experience. Some of the girls I met went back home as slim as when they left.

So, where was I? Ah, after that I came to Belgium and managed to lead a pretty balanced life. Fresh food, lots of vegetables, brown bread and whole grain goods. Frequent walk/jog at a beautiful park. I didn't lose any weight, though.

Fast forward: back to Brazil, gym, walk to work, watch what I eat, no results.

Again in Belgium, eating healthy, fresh food, exercising in a random frequency (sometimes walking, running, biking, playing tennis, dancing) and still frustrated with the scales and the clothes that don't fit well anymore (I had a crying fit when a dress I wore for NYE wouldn't zip when I tried it on in July). Oh, and the pictures. When I see myself in pictures, it really downs on me. I realize I am fighting my genetic heritage. Women in my family tend to gain weight after their mid-twenties. It will be hard (God, I LOVE FOOD), but I know I can win.

Today I am about 15kg more awesome than when I left home four years ago. That's not such a bad average. So many changes, learning, adventures and fun memories required more space, teehee! Self-indulgence, pleasant moments with friends and exploring every new kind of flavors had its price. I understand and accept that.

I have been learning to love myself and to believe in my beauty. I have been learning that exercising in order to be healthy and strong is more important than checking my weight every week. Most importantly, I have been learning to respect my body and to honor it with nutritious food.

I don't want to be the skinny girl who is miserable because of her restrictive diet. I don't want to be the one saying "Oh my god, do you know how many calories are in this piece of cake?" I believe in balance. I want to live a healthy, happy life. I want to be active because it's fun and not because I have to. I want to enjoy life, eat cake and drink wine. If I lose a couple of kilos on the way, great. If not, I'm still me, I'm beautiful, brave and smart and I love myself.

*So, beautiful Au Pair, love your body! Move it! Eat nutritious stuff!*

## *The “I don’t need this!” moments*

I think many of you will relate with this topic.

I had a good life back home. I had a University degree and a job. I spoke a foreign language. I didn’t **need** to go to “America” and work as a nanny. I didn’t **need** to send money back to my family. I didn’t **need** to face so many challenges.

But I **wanted** to. I knew it would be good. I went for the cultural exchange and for the travelling opportunities. I wanted to expand my horizons.

Au Pair life was gentle for me. Most of the times. Some friends didn’t have the same luck. When kids are nasty to you, throw tantrums, refuse to obey, mock your accent, hit you, spit on you, boss you around or treat you like you’re stupid, you will want to pack your bags and go home. Maybe when you have to clean their poop or puke you will think “I didn’t go to school for this”. Maybe you’re PMSing and just want to scream and kick stuff around.

*It’s all good. You really don’t need it.*

*But you want it.*

Those moments will pass and the best memories will stay. The kids will say they love you and give you a ton of drawings. They’ll say your food is the best in the whole world. They’ll give you a sweet nickname. They’ll come kiss you goodnight. They’ll learn stuff from you and will always remember. So, **take deep breaths and find the bright side of things!**

Now, some problems are not solved by taking deep breaths. If you're really unhappy with your host family, **be honest and talk about it**. Try to find a solution. If that doesn't work, **ask for a rematch**. It sounds stressful but it can be the best for you all. If you decide **you really don't need this shit**, quit. You'll have a safe place to go back to.

## Friendship + Love



One of the best things about all this is the friends you make.

They will be your support in this adventure and your party/travel buddies. I met so many incredible people from all over the world! I learned so much in sharing our stories, our culture, our fears and dreams. I had so much fun on trips, parties, dinners and lazy weekends.

We become very vulnerable and sensitive when living abroad. The emotions tend to be more intense and confusing. It's important to have good people around you.

The sad thing is: you will have to part. Your relationship might never be the same. You might lose touch with some friends as you get busy back home, going on with your life. That's ok. I believe that not everyone that comes into your path is meant to stay. They will play their part and leave their mark. It was hard for me to understand that. I had best friends during my Au Pair years and now we rarely talk. But I cherish all we lived together and try to chat about what's going on now and then.

On the other hand, you'll always have cool, friendly connections all over. I have visited friends in France and Germany. I met up with 3 friends in São Paulo when I flew back from New Jersey. These reunions are unbelievable. I still talk with many of them online and we'll probably meet again someday. You never know.

Talking about **love abroad** is a bit delicate and controversial.

From my experience, as I said before, we become very vulnerable. And needy. We want to be loved. We want someone by our side. We want affection and attention. This is not a rule, though. I've met Au Pairs who:

- Had a boyfriend back home and were loyal;
- Had a boyfriend back home and broke up after some time;
- Had fun with casual relationships or hook-ups;
- Met someone special and are still in a serious relationship;
- Met someone special and got married/had children;
- Got involved with someone and got hurt;
- Focused on travelling, studying, working, instead.

Everything can happen. It's truly a life changing experience and you can't plan every detail. Be open to love.

*Love the shit out of everything, starting with yourself. Love your life, love your friends, love your choices.*

Don't be afraid of loving or getting attached and then having to leave.

Don't be afraid of getting hurt.

Don't be obsessed about finding someone.

*Let things flow.*

## *Simple things I learned*

Needless to say (again), that you will learn to be more independent, mature, resourceful, flexible, adaptable, etc. Those are all awesome things to be, but the little things can also do magic on your daily life! So here are things I learned:

- Speak better English;
- Drive better;
- Use a GPS;
- Read maps;
- Find my way around a new city;
- Deal with cultural differences and not judge them;
- Cook different meals;
- Plan and prepare a trip;
- Pack light;
- Let go of stuff;
- Save money;
- Manage time;
- Deal with children;
- Be (even) more patient;
- Be (even) more organized;

- Not to plan too much ahead;
- Improvise;
- Bring plans into reality.

## Children

Before being an Au Pair for the first time, I worried if I could manage the work. I read some articles on children development and psychology, watched countless episodes of Super Nanny, talked with their Au Pair at the time and imagined my actions and reactions in every possible situation.

I was also concerned that they wouldn't love me. Ha!

Everything I read and watched helped a little, but what really built my relationship with "my" kids were clear **communication, respect and kindness**. I used to tell them that I was there for them, that they could trust me and count on me and that I would do my best to help them out. In return, they should listen to me because I was older and I knew what was best. Also, because I was the boss. Teehee!

It took me some time and practice to find balance between being firm / loving / too strict / too permissive.

There were times when I had to bribe them to get them to do something.

There were times when I had to raise my voice.

Put them in the corner.

Let them cry their eyes out in their bedrooms until they were able to actually talk.

Literally pick them up and carry them away.

Yank stuff from their hands + hide toys if they fought for them (or with them! The wooden swords went missing for a loooong while he he).

Make them apologize to each other (and to me), hug and promise to be good.

*Even though we loved each other, there was no easy, magical way to go through our everyday routines, where we all get tired + hungry + cranky.*

*There was no "How to deal with a ... child" manual. I had to get to know each of them and their special personalities.*

A **crying kid**, for example. If they were hurt I would take care of the bump/scratch/cut and assure them it would be alright. If they wanted to get something I would just say “crying is not how you get it, being nice is how you get it”. If there was no apparent reason, I’d ask “Are you hurt? No? Good, then there is no reason for crying”. Often times I would get them distracted by talking about other stuff, or by asking them to play with me, or by being silly. They would also stop when I said I really wanted to help them, but couldn’t understand what they were saying while crying.

**Misbehaving.** Hitting each other. Yelling. Not listening. I used to ask nicely. Give them a warning. Count to three. Put them in a corner for a few minutes. They should have it clear and know the drill. If you’re counting to three they should know it’s their last chance to do or stop doing whatever it is. After the time out, I used to go and talk to them quickly to make sure they understood what happened + apologized. I would give them a hug and say I loved them, I just wasn’t happy about that particular behavior. I didn’t drag and we went back to playing, etc.

Now, about being “playful”. I’m not the most active, outdoorsy person on earth. I tried my best, though. Normally I would let them be and play whatever they wanted while I cleared their backpacks and prepared food. I motivated them to play without me. If they couldn’t decide or were too bored, I would ask them to do something with me.

Kids stuff I love: Lego, crafts, coloring, drawing, painting, puzzles, board games, reading, listening to audio books / children’s songs, baking cookies and cupcakes, cuddling up and watching a movie.

*caring for them was the biggest responsibility + challenge of my life. But SO rewarding! I got tons of daily cards, drawings, crafts, little gifts, hugs, kisses, “I love you”, nicknames + fun memories that I’ll never forget.*



## The power of patience

When the child throws a crying fit for no apparent reason – be patient.

When the hosts call you saying they’re running late – be patient.

When all the mess and dirty dishes from the weekend are there on Monday – be patient.

When the children don't listen to you – be patient.

When you miss your train – be patient.

When you miss your flight – ok, freak out a little and then – be patient.

When your boyfriend doesn't reply to your sms – be patient.

When your flight is delayed, when your luggage is the last one on the carousel – be patient.

When a kid gets sick and stays home all day – be patient.

When they knock on your door at 7am on a Saturday – be patient.

I was always a super patient teacher and Au Pair (God knows you need it when dealing with people).

It has nothing to do with being apathetic and accepting any shit that comes your way. It has to do with taking really deep breaths before taking the appropriate and possible action.

Freaking out, screaming, whining, hitting stuff (or people) won't solve your situation. Especially when there's nothing you can do (but be patient and wait for it to unfold). When there *is* something you can do, though, you better do it clear-minded.

## The perks of caring for school-aged kids

School in the USA and Europe is usually from 9am to 3pm, with variations. All the kids I took care of went to school full time. It meant that for the first time in my whole life I would have a whole lot of free time. Every day!

I was thrilled and scared. I'm a hard worker, but I'm good in getting lazy if I don't **have** to do anything. It would be easy to crawl back to bed, watch TV, hang out online or take ridiculously long naps. Oh, heck, why not? Sometimes I did just that. And then I felt bad. And then I found balance.

I forced myself to move: go for a walk, go to the gym, dance, stretch and run.

I went to classes: English, Spanish, French, Fiction Writing.

I watched more movies and series than I thought possible.

I read an incredible amount of books. Yay!!! They were so cheap and I bought so many I had to mail them home in a box.

I hung out with the girls.

I kept my room clean.

I took baths, did my nails, hair and girly things like that.

I wrote on my journal and blog.

I meditated.

I read blogs.



I chatted with friends and family online.

I planned trips.

I thought about life.

During the first summer, the camp bus came to pick them up at 8am and to drop them off at 4pm. Oh, goodness! I watched ALL seasons of Sex and the City that summer.

In the end, it didn't really feel like so much free time. I didn't feel so lazy and useless like I first imagined.

## *USA vs Europe vs me*

I always say that I was called to the right places at the right moments. They gave me exactly what I needed and I gave myself to these countries the best I could.

Looking back at my time in the US of A, I don't even recognize myself. I used to go party in NYC and go back in the first morning train. I used to be more spontaneous and do unplanned stuff. I was more open to hanging out and travelling with people I barely knew (Miami – Key West road trip with people we met at the hostel days before). I used to sleep at friends' houses if it became too late to go home.

It was fun!

It was what I needed at that time.

Remember: I grew up in a small town and had never been abroad. I was always focused on my studies and work. I was social and went out often, but it was quiet. I needed to **break free**.

I felt like I was on very long vacations there and that I had to make the most of them. It was the time of my life and the countdown for the return home pressured me to enjoy every day more and more. Plus, nobody knew me there. **Nobody had expectations of how I should behave and I didn't care what people would think.** I was free and I had a blast!

Belgium was different, just like **I** was different. I had become more introverted and quiet. I still travelled a lot, went dancing and hung out with new friends, but

I also loved staying home and going to bed early. I rediscovered the power of solitude, of just being with myself in silence.

I lived in a very small village where there was a castle and a lot of nature. I had my own space apart from the family and that gave me a big sense of privacy. I enjoyed that a lot. I didn't feel urged or forced to leave the house to get some time out.

Maybe that made my adaptation more difficult and lonely. Maybe I locked myself up a bit. But maybe that was just a reflex of my changes. I didn't need to go to a crowded club and dance all night. I didn't need to wait for the first bus home in the morning, exhausted. I didn't need to look for "love". And I didn't need to make a bazillion new friends.

I was pretty content in staying in my (huuuge) bed reading a good book or watching movies and series.

And this sleeping early thing? It's magical.

Call me old and boring, but on the course of my experience living abroad I learned a lot of important shit. Respecting my body and feelings is one of them. I don't go out nor do stuff I don't really feel like. I don't care if they'll think I'm boring. If I'd much rather watch a movie, sleep, read, write or just stay with myself, that's ok. I won't go anywhere because "everybody will be there".

What changed here is that I don't think I absolutely have to do stuff (even if I don't really feel like) because otherwise I would be missing out.

## Dreams coming true

I always wanted to live abroad but had no idea how I would do it. Nobody in my family had ever left our country and I didn't know many people who had. My

hometown is very small and people think that going abroad (or any big dream you have) is “out of this world”. Besides, I just couldn’t afford it.

But I **knew** it wasn’t impossible and I eventually figured it out.

*The moment I set foot on that plane to New York I knew deep in my heart that I could do whatever I set my mind and heart to.*

I went to the USA and spoke English every day, saw snow, wore winter clothes (so chic!) and travelled around with my backpack. I visited places I had always dreamed of, met people from all over the world, and tried different foods and drinks... that was it! Dream = reality!

Now I’m going to confess something silly: I have been a Backstreet Boys’ fan since I was 13 years old. Oh, how I dreamed! I dreamed of meeting them, talking to them, becoming friends with them, marrying AJ! I dreamed of sitting on the front row of every show, and they would sing for me and blow me kisses! I dreamed I would travel the world with them! I had all the CDs, magazines, posters and collectibles I could find. I had “Backstreet friends” on online communities and in real life and we used to spend hours and hours watching videos and plotting ways to meet them.

As I grew, I continued to buy all the CDs and enjoy their music. I saw them getting married and having kids. I saw them split up and pause their career for a while...

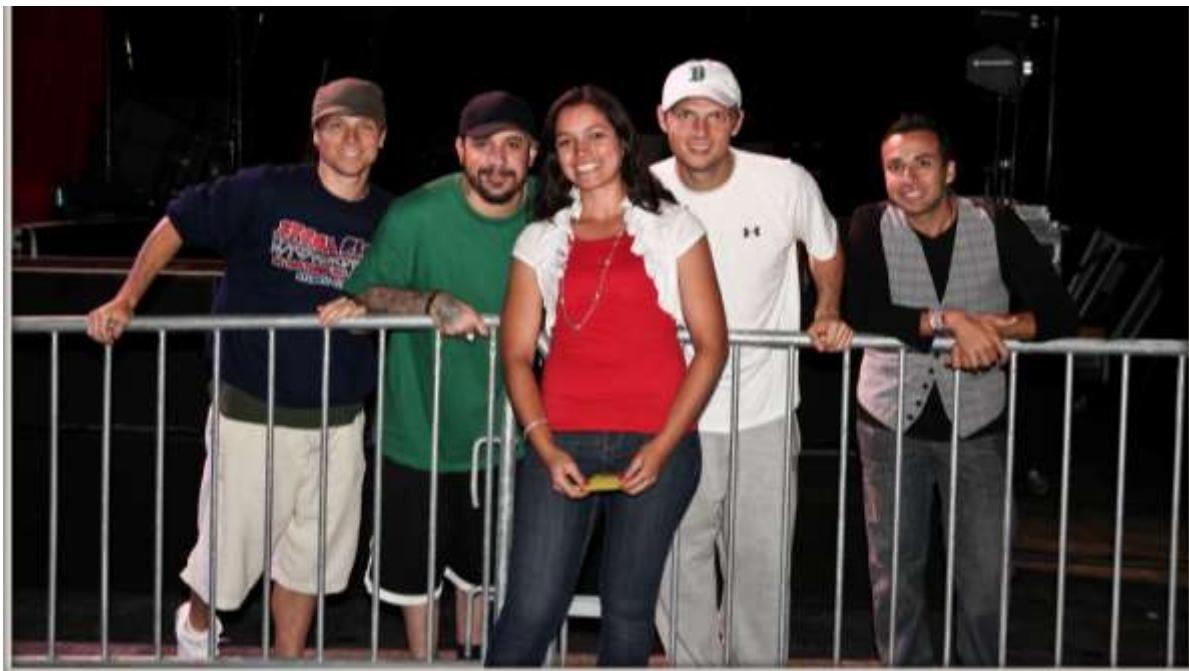
But then, they came to NJ! I HAD to go see them! It was a festival and they only sang a few songs but, “Oh, my God, I SAW them LIVE! Right in front of me!” The teenage girl inside of me screamed her lungs out and didn’t blink once. The following day we got a hint on what hotel they were staying in NYC and we

waited outside for hours. We didn't see them, but it was so much fun. I owed that to myself.

So I did it again. And I did it better: VIP area + photo + sound check the next time they came to NJ.

Hihihih!

I watched them check the sound and answer questions from the fans. I took a picture with them and I totally HUGGED the shit out of AJ (you're only allowed a handshake). AND I stayed on the front row during the show. I couldn't stop smiling ☺



You see, it was such a huge dream of mine when I was in my teens. Everything seemed to work out perfectly – for once, the show wasn't far from where I lived and I had the money to pay for the ticket. I felt absolutely amazing.

It sounds silly but it gave me such **peace**. A dream that was there for years and years, dormant and hopeless, suddenly came true! It also gave me even more **strength** and **faith** to fight for my dreams.

I remember a friend saying “Ok, so you’ve done everything you wanted. Now you’ll have to come up with something new” and I said “Don’t worry, I will”.

*Once you walk your dream road, you know the way. You know the feeling.*

*You’ll come up with new dreams and know that nothing is impossible.*

## Top 3 American trips



### Disneyland

It was my first American trip and it was a “must do”. Five days of incredible, magic, fun, dreamy stuff. Everything looked so unreal, I couldn’t stop smiling and thinking “Oh my God, I’m really here”. We would walk around all day and pass out on our beds at night.

We were even invited to participate in the opening ceremony of Hollywood Studios. What a blast! That was my favorite day. Plus, we got the first ride on Rock ‘n Rollercoaster. Alone. Before everyone was allowed in. Teehee! We also got fast passes for the Tower of Terror and rode it twice. Fun, fun, fun!

## Miami

Beach. Party. Beach. Repeat!

We stayed at a cheap hostel a couple of blocks from South Beach. It was beeeeautiful!

We made new friends and drove with them to Key West.

We missed our flight to NJ because of that.

Just another adventure on a fun-filled week.

## West Coast

Oooh, yeah! Ca.li.for.nia, baby.

Someone should have told me – in time – that San Francisco was much nicer than L.A. I only spent one day there and I was all by myself, but IT – WAS – AWESOME. The city is beautiful, the piers, Alcatraz, the hills, the bridge. It FEELS good to be there.

L.A is overrated. I found it dirty and a bit boring. I visited the Hollywood sign, Santa Monica beach, the Walk of Fame. The most fun was on my last night there, on West Hollywood (gay dancing clubs, Woohoo!). Maybe my expectations were too high. Or my judgment was clouded by San Francisco + Vegas + The Grand Canyon.

I took a bus tour to the Grand Canyon. It is still THE most amazing thing of nature I have seen in my life. It's ridonkulously gigantic and gorgeous. It made me feel so small and my problems disappeared. I sat there for a long time reflecting on that and feeling good and light.

We spent two nights in the Sin City. It's a shame that I was alone, so I didn't gamble or party. I didn't really feel like it, though. Vegas is such an absurd city. So bright and colorful and fake.

All in all it was a fantastic time 😊

## Top 3 European trips



### Italy

First, I went to Tuscany with the family for a week. The place really reminded me of home: the hills, the vegetation, the houses and the smells of food, flowers and fruit. It was a “work” week – playing with the children, relaxing by the pool and eating delicious food.

After that, my friend (my host dad's sister's Au Pair) and I went to Florence, Rome and Venice. The weather was beautiful, the cities are incredibly charming and needless to say, the food was amazing! Oh, and GELATOS!

We met a solo traveler from the US and toured Florence together.

We joined a couple of friends from Belgium who were also in Rome. We threw our coins in the Fontana di Trevi, saw the Coliseum and lots of other ruins and museums, drank water from the fountains, visited Vatican City.

We didn't go on a gondola ride in Venice, but we got a free ferry ride + free entrance to the Casino where there was a live singer and piano player and they served us champagne and strawberries.

I could understand a bit of Italian and I loved being called "bella". Oh, Italy!

### *London*

As an English graduate, I always dreamed of going to London. I wanted to be where all those writers had been inspired. I wanted to see where the royal family lived. And of course I wanted to see Platform 9 3/4!

It was the first time I surfed someone's couch via Couchsurfing. It was amazing – he showed us around during the weekend and we had great conversations!

We went to the Nothing Hill fair, rode the London Eye, went on a boat ride on the Thames, saw the Parliament, the Abbey, the Palace and the change of guards, Piccadilly, rode the red double deck bus, went to pubs and had a great time watching people on the street (it was Halloween).

### *Porto*

Oh, the joy of warm weather in February + speaking my own language! I don't know if that's what made Porto one of my favorite cities in the world or if it's just one of the factors.

Porto has a lot to offer: river, beach, historical city center, modern city center. The food is simply fantastic and cheap (once we got a full meal – salad, stew, potatoes, a drink, dessert and coffee - for 6,50 Euros!).

We visited one of the *caves* and tasted red and white Porto + we went to a wine festival where there were hundreds of producers' stands.

The hostel we stayed was THE best I've been – nice house, clean, comfortable bedrooms, yummy breakfast and super nice people. We all dressed up and went to the *Carnaval* parties together! ☺

## Is it a waste of time?

I could have stayed in Brazil and “moved on with my life”. You know, do all the shit that’s expected of us. Further my education, get a job, get a car, get my own place, get a f\*\*\*ing boyfriend, for goodness’ sakes! Get married. Have a baby. Have another one. Diet.

I could also have got a job, enjoy life at home, save some money and go abroad on vacation. That would have been awesome too.

I had options, hurray! We all have.

And I had a BIG feeling / intuition that I wanted to see more of the world. I knew how to do it and I was brave enough. I knew I needed it and I absolutely, no doubt about it HAD TO. So I did.

I chose to be an Au Pair a second time. Whaaaat? Crazy! Why?

Did I waste my time? Was I too old for that? Should I have focused on my career development?

The truth is, I learned a bazillion times more living abroad for 18 months than I did in University for 4 years. The other truth is, my career could wait. The other and truest of all is: I had no clue what to do with my professional life. I didn’t want to “focus on my career” because I didn’t particularly love it or saw myself in it in the future. I didn’t see myself living in my hometown either.

SO. No, it wasn’t a waste of time for this particular brave/crazy \*twice\* Au Pair.

However, each one of us has our own truths. If you feel like staying home and close to your family, do it. If you feel like getting married, do it. If you feel like working your ass off in order to grow professionally, dooo iiiit! Or work on a cruise ship for six months.

*Do whatever feels right in your life at the moment.*

*We're never too old to go back or to start over.*

*Living abroad is not glamorous, but it's awesome!*

Change is the law of life. Unlike many people I know, I was never afraid of it. In fact, I sought it.

2009 was the year that changed my life. It was when I left home and went abroad for the first time. After doing everything “by the book” – school, University, work – I decided to quit my job and be an Au Pair in the USA.

I lived with a family in NJ for 18 months and travelled to some of the most famous American destinations: NYC, Disneyland, Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, the Grand Canyon, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Washington DC, etc.

During that year, there were a lot of firsts: flying, seeing snow, listening to many different languages, travelling by train, staying at hostels, travelling solo, going on road trips with people we just met at a hostel, trying new foods, having a memorable hangover. Sometimes even opening a door or using home appliances or shower was a new challenge. It was ridiculous. And awesome. I laughed a lot with myself and learned with every task I had to do. Oh, I also cried a lot. It felt absurdly overwhelming at times and I had thoughts of giving up and going back to the comfort of my home. Even though you make many friends, in the end you

are alone. The feelings and lessons you have to work out, you work them out alone. The big life decisions, you make them alone. Often times I felt lonely and sad, but mostly I felt sure that it was the best thing I had ever done in my life, this living abroad thing.

When you go off by yourself and face the new every single day, you have no choice but evolving. You become more independent, more mature, more understanding, and more flexible. You can reinvent yourself, you can be free. You don't have to fulfill anybody's expectations on what you should do and how you should behave. Nobody knows you and that's an opportunity to open up, connect and have loads of fun!

Choose your new friends, hang out with people who make you feel good and who can relate with your beliefs and dreams. I made friends in church, Au Pair cluster meetings, parties, hostels, Couchsurfing and more. They include travelers from everywhere, locals, and Brazilian expats. I learned so much about relationships and culture and they were my support team. On the other hand, the sad fact is: most of them will follow their paths and you'll eventually lose contact. But as I tell myself, "C'est la vie". Thanks to the internet I still keep regular contact with some of the friends I met abroad and I'm sure we'll meet someday somewhere.

My time abroad was so amazing that I couldn't sit still at home for even a year. After having a taste of what's out there, out of my bubble, I wanted more! I came to Belgium to be an Au Pair again (I know, crazy) and lived next to a real castle (!) for a year. I visited all the countries I had in mind: Portugal, Spain, France, England, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Holland. I visited friends I had met in the US; friends from Brazil; surfed someone's couch for the first time and had long philosophical and spiritual conversations; and stayed in the best hostel ever.

My year in Europe was truly beautiful. Although sometimes I got a feeling that “this is just a city like any other” I learned to be more open to what the places have to offer, what’s special about them and their people. Now my list of places I want to visit has expanded and I want to experience really different cultures, like Asian and Middle-Eastern.

I grew more and more passionate about living abroad. Many people ask me for advice about it or tell me about their fears, lack of money or other things holding them back. My answer is always: GO! Put your plan on paper, prepare, be brave and go! If you have that itch, it’ll never go away until you do it. The experience of being abroad is so enriching, it’s more valuable than any material stuff you would choose to spend your money on instead. I used to tell my friends back home: **“I came back poor, but I have LIVED!”**

That tearful, scared girl who left her hometown in 2009 never came back. Of course she cries and gets scared sometimes, but it’s different now. Living abroad has changed my path like I would have never imagined. It changed the way I see the world and its people; it changed my decisions; it changed some of my interests, opinions and behavior. It really changed the course my life is taking.

## *Going back*

Sometime before going back home I started obsessing about what would come next. “What the heck am I going to do with my life?” In my dreams of living abroad, I would learn everything I needed on the journey and in the end I would have everything figured out to start a real grown-up life. Pff! Wasn’t I wrong?! I had a few options to consider, but I wasn’t sure about any. I was scared and conflicted: happy to see my dear ones again and sad because I wouldn’t see my new friends anymore. Another jump into the unknown.

As I prepared to return, I reflected a lot on this quote:

*"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." - Heraclitus*

I had changed, indeed, but everything else was pretty much the same. It was like I had been in a dream and suddenly woke up. My American life turned into memories and stories that didn't really interest most people around me. Being home was comfortable and safe, but I couldn't relate to many things anymore. I felt like a stranger.

I was offered my old job back and even though I felt like it was wrong to just go back to where I was before leaving, I accepted it. It was great to **keep busy**, meet new people, re-connect with old colleagues and share what I had learned abroad. I stayed for one semester before quitting. I wasn't sure what I would do, but I knew that I wanted to travel again.

### **I few weeks later I had found a host family in Belgium and we started organizing our documents!**

After a year in Belgium, I had to go home once more. This time though, the situation was different and I felt lighter. I knew for sure that I wouldn't stay. I focused on finding a way to go back to my Belgian boyfriend. And I focused on enjoying every minute with my family. The idea of actually living abroad for an undetermined period of time was hard to wrap my mind around. It felt wrong to "abandon" my family, but I was sure I couldn't stay. That wasn't my place anymore.

So, after all this coming and going, being lost and scared, I learned some things:

1. It's not the end of the world (as I thought sometimes). You can always make the best of it and find a way around it. My choice was to go away

again, but I could have stayed and built a new life at home as well. I just wasn't called for that at the time. I trust my gut feeling and it's usually right.

2. Let go of the past. Life as I knew as an Au Pair in the USA and Belgium was gone and I had to accept and move on. I had to look forward and start fresh once again.

*So... what now?*



Or: "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

That's one of the questions that have been messing around my mind since I was a kid. I remember saying I wanted to be an actress, so that I could pretend being lots of other things. Indecision right there. I also remember me thinking how unfair the world was and I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to give a decent house and food to everyone. There's more: I liked to imagine how I would fix my hometown, creating a clean, happy place to live.

I was always a good student, getting high grades and never failing my exams, but I never understood why we had to study stuff like complicated math, chemistry or physics. I wanted to learn first aids, cooking, driving and other useful subjects. I loved my history, language and literature classes.

When the time to choose my major came, I had no idea what I wanted to be. Besides, my choices were limited: I had to choose among the courses my local University offered. So I went through the brochure once again, crossing out what I definitely didn't want: Medicine, Dentistry, Nursery, Law, Physical Education, IT and all that. I ended up applying for English Language and Literature and got first place on the exam. I didn't really want to be a teacher, but I loved English, reading and writing.

I started teaching when I was 19 and I did it well, but I didn't love it. I graduated and decided I had to do something new. I needed a change or I would get stuck on that life. I knew I could do better. And so I left home and became an Au Pair at 22.

I really believed that the time abroad, the adventure, the learning-more-about-myself thing would finally give me THE answer I needed. And I would be all “Aha! I know what I want to be when I grow up!”

I wasn't totally wrong. I did learn a lot about myself and life, but I realized that being absolutely certain about what you're supposed to do is not that easy. However, as I talked to friends I saw that they had the same feeling and I read a lot about the mid-twenties crisis. These are indeed hard times, when you have to take control and responsibility over your life. When you have to make decisions for the future and take important steps towards it. When you “have to” do a lot of stuff you're “supposed to”.

\*SIGH\*

I'm 27 and I just moved back to Belgium. To start building a brand new life. I'm not a teacher anymore. I'm not an Au Pair anymore. I'm just me for now. Sometimes it makes me nervous to have such a blank page in front of me. I don't even know how the next few months are going to be. Other times, though, I feel grateful and excited for this time to learn, change, choose and create.

I want to have freedom and power over my own life. I want to work when and where I like and as much as I like. I want to share and be useful and helpful. Although I have a few faint ideas on how to do that, I still have doubts. What are my gifts and passions? How can I join my education, life experience and passions and make a living?

Maybe I should just forget all that “dreamy” stuff and just get any job I can to make the money I need. Like most people do. But I take my sanity very seriously and I believe in myself. I’ve been reading and playing around with ideas. Volunteering, networking, writing on my blog. I know I won’t settle for any 9 to 5 job.

On this soul-searching journey, I have learned to:

- Always invest in myself. Education, books, courses, seminars. You can never know enough.
- Do what is doable at the moment. Don’t wait for it to be perfect or it might never come.
- Look for support! I stopped trying to solve everything myself. Often times the answer I need is not in my own head.

## Cool and useful resources

Au Pair Garden - <http://aupairgarden.com/>

Au Pair World - <http://www.aupair-world.net/>

Atlas Sliced - <http://atlassliced.com/>

Cultural Care Au Pair - <http://culturalcareupair.com/>

Couchsurfing - [www.couchsurfing.org](http://www.couchsurfing.org)

Expedia Travel - <http://www.expedia.com/>

Hostel World - <http://www.hostelworld.com/>

International Au Pair Association - <http://iapa.org/>

Livemocha - <http://livemocha.com/>

Shared Talk by Rosetta Stone - <http://sharedtalk.com/>

Small Planet Studio - <http://www.smallplanetstudio.com/>

So lovelies, I hope this book has inspired you to *live your dreams* and *be the best YOU you can be*. Even when people around you don't understand your big ideas and tell you it's too crazy, dangerous, expensive or a waste of time. Only YOU know what you are meant to do and where you are meant to go. *Trust your guts!*

Living abroad is more than just a change of environment and lifestyle. It's a journey of self-discovery and self-development. *It's giving space for the true you to flourish* – away from your duties, expectations, demands, routine. It's pushing you farther and farther from your comfort zone and *giving you the lessons and wisdom you need.*

Now I urge you: if you hear that little voice in the back of your head telling you to follow your dreams, to let go of your limiting reality and to spread your wings as far as they can reach, LISTEN TO IT!

Don't wait for a perfect moment - start taking *one step at a time* now.

Don't let negative people suck the energy + dreams out of you.

Don't be afraid!

Go create your awesome life!

Ana Elisa

## What former Au Pairs have to say:

"I came to the USA in 2009 as an Au Pair. To me, the program opened so many doors, and made me see the world with different eyes. It also made me realize how strong I am, how important my family is, and how adaptable human beings are. Because of the Au Pair program, I was able to apply for my Masters degree here in the USA, and find job opportunities that I wouldn't even dream of. I've met so many people, been to so many places, and changed to possible what I thought to be impossible."

Diego B. Olegário, 28. Administrative Assistant at ABRACE - Brazilian Association of Culture and Education in Washington, DC.

"The experience I had as an Au Pair impacted my life in a big way. I was just 18 years old when I left home to become an Au Pair, and that's a really crucial time in your life. That time in your life when you stop being a teen to start being an adult. That time is pretty much what defines your goals and dreams. Being an Au Pair made me think A LOT of what I was going to do when I get back home. Living in the US made me see life totally in a different way than I was used to see my life back home. Learned new things, met new people, new places and lots of cultures and learned how to be independent and appreciate more what I have in my country as well."

Mariana, 22, Costa Rica.

"Looking back at the years I spent being an Au Pair, I can say now that they have completely impacted me in a positive way and that all I learnt keep on transforming the way I live my life today.

*It all starts with fear and uncertainty same as with excitement. It's not an easy decision to leave your loved ones back home and wander to the unknown. But after you have stepped outside, seen different landscapes, tried new and exotic flavors, met incredible people, been lost in translation, and most importantly got to know yourself better; then you realize that it was completely worth it.*

*Now I can proudly say that I have a family in 3 different countries, bonds created to last forever, not to mention some real friendships I've made all around the globe. Being an Au Pair was the eye-opening to adventure, life, people, curiosity and self-discovery.*

*My name is Pilar, I'm a Colombian girl of 24 years old and after being an Au Pair for 3 years, in 2 countries (USA and Belgium), I now can say that the world is my house, but Dubai is my current harbor."*

*"Being an au pair was a life-changing experience for me. As I have a European passport, I didn't do the formal program, so in a year and a half I worked and lived with three different families, from three different origins: Belgium, England and France. I got involved in difficult family situations, saw parents arguing and divorcing, looked after kids when the single mother had to work in another country, had a teenage girl asking me about sex... It was scary but deeply enriching. It showed me that besides the big cultural differences, in the end of the day, family is always family."*

Maitê Blacquaert, 26. Journalist in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

<http://anosemverao.blogspot.com/> (in Portuguese)

*"A year in America has taught me a lot. I was an au pair in New Jersey, back in 2009, and I had a wonderful time there. My host family was not perfect, but I learned to build a "give and take" relationship! And it was totally worth all the effort! I broke away from my comfort zone and became more independent! I had to perform household chores on my own, for instance, doing my own laundry, ironing shirts when needed, cook lunch/dinner... I also learned to be more open-minded and to take risks! I never travelled so much in my life; I visited 7 states and 1 country! Although it has been almost 4 years, all the memories are still vivid in my mind and I'll never forget all the support I got from my host family and from all the friends I made there!"*

Daniella, 27. English Teacher in São Paulo, Brazil.

*"In 2008 I had the amazing opportunity of going to the United States as an au pair. If anybody asks me what was the best experience of my life I would say: "Living in America". I was lucky since my process went fast and I got to live with 2 great families in Massachusetts and Connecticut: 2 beautiful states that I loved! I met amazing people, wonderful places and had the opportunity to get to know American culture beyond my books. I believe this had a great importance in my life not only because I had a dream come true but because I was able to open up my mind to different things from the ones I was used to at my home country and most importantly: I improved my English and became fluent on it. English has opened many doors for me. I am a better English teacher today and even got the opportunity to work on a cruise ship where I met tons of countries and many more different cultures. I owe it all to my past experience as an au pair in America because it made me brave and not afraid of challenges!"*

Alcilene de Oliveira Souza, 26. English Teacher in Montes Claros, Brazil.

## A thank you note

I am thankful for all the people who crossed my path when I was an Au Pair – they were meant to be part of my story;

I am thankful for all the support I have from my beautiful family, friends and boyfriend;

And I am thankful for you reading this right now. YOU ARE AWESOME.  
Thanks for trusting and believing in me.

## Disclaimer

This book is solely based on my own experiences and opinions.

No one is authorized to use any part of this publication without my prior consent.

The links to third party websites are mere recommendations, since I have used them and liked. I am not responsible for their content.

If you feel like people should read this book, please refer them

to [www.anaelisamiranda.com](http://www.anaelisamiranda.com)

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