

Host Family Ritter Gubbay from New Jersey with Au Pair Svetlana from the Czech Republic

There is magic in our home. . . .and it's name is Svetlana! She came to us eight months ago from the Czech Republic and we have been laughing ever since. She is our sixth au pair. Each year I see the email about this contest and each year, though I have had some wonderful au pairs, I never quite feel I have one to submit to the Ultimate Au Pair Contest. . . .this year, it's different. This year, I have an au pair that is beyond what I could even imagine. Read on and join me in nominating Svetlana the Ultimate Au Pair of 2014: We are a unique family—we lost our husband/Daddy to Breast Cancer—but in many ways we are just like any other family and have a daughter, 11, and a son, 4. In figuring out what constituted the best match for us I had to thoroughly understand exactly what our family needs, values and routines were and I am always really clear about this with the potential au pairs we skype with. I ask them a lot of open-ended questions to get a better sense of who they are and I look for some good chemistry. My original plan was to find Spanish-speaking au pairs for obvious reasons. Sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't. I often found myself drawn to someone that didn't necessarily speak Spanish and I have come to realize over the years that chemistry is more important. This year I decided to try a Czech au pair. We have become very close to two APC Au Pairs from that area of the world who are now part of our extended family and so it made sense. In fact, one of them helped me interview Svetlana after we had skyped a few times. Svetlana fit all our requirements (except Spanish!) not to mention that she has a little brother a year older than my son and a younger sister a little older than my daughter. From the first time we spoke there was a connection. We skyped with her more than any au pair before—my kids were already becoming attached to her. We were so excited to meet her that upon her arrival in the US, we went to the hotel where the Au Pair School was taking place with our Czech Au Pair friend and hung out at Starbucks altogether for a few hours. From the moment we brought her home she has been a member of our family. She is the big sister to my kids and feels like a daughter to me. She even calls me "Mom" and people always think she's my daughter. I tell them she is my daughter from another mother. There are "I love you's" and laughter flying around my house. I see her running after my four year old or being tackled by my eleven year old. I see in everything she does that she loves my kids. She talks to them like a big sister and cares for each of them in ways specific to their needs even if that means being firm in a challenging moment. During off hours, she often chooses to hang out with us; we all truly enjoy each other's company. I am thrilled to have such a collaborative "employee" who supports me in maintaining our family values and rhythms and also thinks about what would be helpful before I even ask. How many times have I asked if she could do something only to find that it was already done? Many! What is more is that she does everything with a smile on her face and a heart full of love. I was a stay-at-home mom for my first child so if I cannot do that for my second child I need to know that my stand-in is exemplary. And the unexpected bonus is that she has become a dear friend to me, as well. We love learning about her culture and join in on skype with her family (my son and her little brother have a grand time together—two Spidermen from different worlds). Our traditional international Christmas breakfast this year was, you guessed it, Czech. And, to our surprise, she received many gifts from our friends and family who have also come to love her. We are in our eighth month now. Almost immediately upon her arrival we started talking about extending for another year. Now, we are making that into a reality. In the end, she's actually learning Spanish to teach it to the kids. How funny is that? Someday, I know that we will dance at this Ultimate Au Pair's wedding. But today, please help me in voting for her as the Ultimate Au Pair of the Year!!! Thank you.