



My family is writing this letter to explain our appreciation and love of our au pair Melanie. While there are surely many wonderful au pairs, it is impossible for us to imagine one more marvelous or who has had a greater impact on her host family, her community, or her home country than Melanie. Let's get the basics out of the way: she's smart, creative, responsible, and unshakably optimistic: the boys' perfect big sister. To our older son, Akira, she is the cool sister who teaches him about technology and the world of art and music, while to our younger son, Kenji, she is the ultimate playdate. Melanie loves the boys and genuinely enjoys spending time with them. We know the boys feel the same.

Melanie encourages both our sons to explore the arts with her, and together they've worked on a wide range of projects. She and Kenji recently completed a book filled with directions for creating original Star Wars themed origamis. What impressed us about this project is that she didn't create the directions or the book herself, but rather encouraged and guided Kenji through the project. When he finally presented us with the finished book, we've never seen him prouder. For his birthday, Melanie surprised Akira by painting a baseball scene on the wall of our playroom. This meshed wonderfully with the Lego themed murals she'd painted previously as a surprise while we were away on vacation.

In addition to inspiring our children's artistic interests, Melanie has helped Akira and Kenji to expand their knowledge of Mexico and the Spanish language. She's shared with them stories and traditions from her country. She also speaks to them in Spanish, and, over the last year, their Spanish speaking skills have improved greatly.

More important to us than the skills she's nurturing in our children, are the behaviors she role models. Since she left Mexico to become our au pair, Melanie has suffered through several hardships, including the loss of friends and family back home and a medical setback. Through all of this, she has somehow maintained a positive and hopeful outlook, which we all find inspirational. After going through a CT scan, she told us she had to "try not to smile during the test, because it was just like in the movies!"

Melanie is full of happy energy and projects a positive vibe, and she always shows appreciation for what we do, what we have, and our values. When she's not "on duty" she often hangs out with us like a true family member. Melanie spends the holidays with our extended family, and my husband's parents, aunts and cousins took to her instantly. For Christmas, my husband's parents hung a stocking for Melanie on their mantle, right next to those of the rest of the family. She returned the gesture by gifting them a beautiful calendar highlighting birthdays, anniversaries and other important family dates. Each season was lovingly decorated with her hand drawn illustrations.

What impresses us the most about Melanie is that in addition to all the time she spends with us, she also finds the energy to care for so many others in the au pair community. She serves as a natural ambassador for the program, answering questions and encouraging others to join the program. She has also helped au pairs facing emotional and personal challenges such as homesickness.

Melanie's big heart is not limited to helping the au pair community. She's amazingly active in charity work. By offering custom illustrations in return for donations, she raised over \$5,000 dollars to help Mexico recover from its two devastating earthquakes in 2017—an effort that was highlighted on a local news program. Melanie was pleased about this exposure because it not only helped her raise funds, but painted au pairs and immigrants in a positive light—a personal objective of hers that in part drove her decision to come to the United States.

