

## Seven months that changed my life

1<sup>st</sup> of December 2013 was a special day, it was the day I moved to England (to be more exact: Weybridge, Surrey), the day I moved away from home for the first time in my life. About a week and a half earlier I had spoken with my host family on Skype deciding the date, so the whole process from being introduced to my host family to moving there went very quickly.

### **A good feeling from the start**

From the first time we spoke, I felt a connection with the Harris family: Claudine and Simon - my host parents and Taya and Jamie - their kids, at the time 10 and 7 years old. Oh and let's not forget their wonderful dog Loki. I think the reason I felt so comfortable with them from day one is that they always have been clear with me. They told me about their son and how much support he was going to need, having to deal with behaviour and anxiety issues since a while back. They needed someone who could be there for him. For me it sounded like a challenge, but not in a bad way!

### **Jamie and Taya – the ups and downs and challenges to overcome**

After my first night living with the Harris family I wrote in my diary: “the children are SO wonderful”. And they were. We became friends very quickly, for me they were like the younger sister and brother I never had. We had a lot of fun playing together – they taught me almost all of their board games and Jamie taught me how to play his video games (I must say I had a natural talent for the video games!). I really loved to play and be a bit silly with them. At the same time I didn't have any trouble knowing when I needed to be more like a parent than a friend.

Having lived with the family a couple of days I started to wonder if this little cute boy with the most wonderful eyes in the world really had any behaviour problems, I sure didn't see them. But one day, out of the blue, he had a big tantrum and I just went blank, I didn't know what to do but most of all I was disappointed in myself for not being able to keep him calm. This was very hard for me at first but I am not the one to give up so easily. For me it is important to don't leave when things get hard. After this day Claudine and I had a talk. Did I have the patient to stay? Was I the right person for the job? I had been thinking about that a lot and yes, I really wanted to help out as much as I could. Now when I knew how a temper tantrum could look like, I was a bit more prepared when the next one came. The months went on and I got to know Jamie better and better. I learned how to react when he was in a bad mood, I figured out ways to make him think of something else. It would be a total lie if I said that it always was easy, because of course it wasn't. But it was worth it, because of the small things and gestures he gave back. For example when he one time after he had been shouting at me gave me a beautiful “I'm sorry note”. Or the times when he just without reason took my hand when we were out walking. It's these little things that just make your heart melt and gives you the hugest smile on your face.

Having to deal a lot with Jamie, I didn't have as much time as I wanted with Taya, but even though, she really was like my little sister and I loved doing things like painting each others nails, talking about life and school together. She was also often very supportive when Jamie was having tantrums, if she saw I had some trouble dealing with him she helped me to get him calm, to distract him from whatever made him go off in the first place. For this maturity of Taya I'm forever grateful.

### **Cultural exchange**

For me, getting to know more about England and English lifestyle was important. If I know more about England now? Yes. My favourite discovery: the roast dinners. Every Sunday my host family served roast dinners and it was almost always my favourite meal of the week. Moving to England and working as an au pair was for me a huge opportunity to learn more about English

traditions and customs. Of course I also wanted to practise my English, and after a CAE-course at Brooklands College in Weybridge I now feel more secure when I'm speaking English. The course was also a good way for me to meet new friends and talk to people from different countries, I got to learn a bit about their customs as well (Spain, France, Poland, Germany).

You may think that Sweden and Britain are quite alike, but having lived in Britain for seven months I can tell that the countries have got differences. Take for an example the schools, here the two countries are very different and I have learnt a lot about the school system in Britain. I have gotten to know so many English expressions that I hadn't heard before, I have learnt that they actually do drink lots and lots of tea, and now so do I. I have learnt to drive on the left hand side of the road, this was one of my biggest worries before I left, but a challenge I set up for myself and an obstacle I overcame. I really loved it when my host family told me new facts about England that I didn't know about, it could be anything really. And I liked to share some facts about Sweden as well, I think in this way we got to know each other better.

### **Adventures with new found friends**

I am being completely honest when I tell you that I found friends for life during my time in England. Right at this moment we are actually planning to go travel in Europe together this summer.

In England we had such a good time together, doing all sorts of things in our spare time. We all loved going in to London so we spent almost every weekend there, now I know every underground line by heart... We often planned what we wanted to do: go to see a musical, go to different museums, visit a special church/cathedral or a special restaurant. There were always things to do! Apart from our weekends in London, my favourite memories with my friends must be when we road tripped to Oxford and Brighton! To see the famous university city Oxford was so wonderful, something I had been wanting to do for a long time. Thinking of it now, I just feel so grateful that I took chance to come to England. I wouldn't have seen and learnt so much, both about England and myself, if it wasn't for my au pair experience!

### **The importance of kind and understanding host parents**

Back to Claudine and Simon, I really want to give them a huge thank you since they are a big reason why my time in England became so meaningful to me. They never shouted at me, they never raised their voices when talking to me. They stood behind me 100% and really trusted me. They were very supportive when my grandfather died and I had to go back home in the middle of the week, to feel that support during such a difficult time in my life was for me so important, to let me come home and grief was for them nothing to even think twice about. And then there was the time I drove their car into another persons car... they reacted really calmly and comforted me when I was sad and felt such huge guilt. They also always wanted me to see and experience as much of England as I possibly could, giving me advices on restaurants to go to, places to see, things to do. I really couldn't have wished for better host parents, and as my host mother said "a happy au pair means happy kids" – a quote that I really do believe in.

Since I left England in July 2014 I have visited my host family two times. It doesn't feel like I am travelling to a foreign country any more, it feels like I am coming to my second home. Seven months in England gave me so much more than I could have dreamed of: I've learned so much about England, so much about myself, and most important, I've made friends for life.



*Ben and I on my 19th birthday, this was my first time eating sushi and the children taught me how to eat it!*



*A selfie with Chloe and Ben, very excited on our way to visit Isle of Wight!*



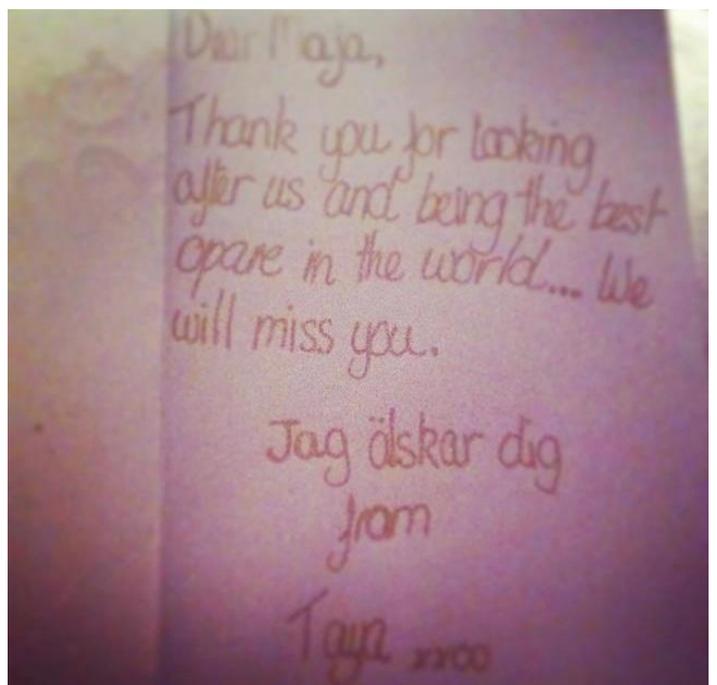
*I finally got to take a dance class at Pinapple dance studios!*



*Two of my closest friends, Lisa and Louise, at Tower Bridge during one of our many weekends in London.*



*Happy friends road tripping to Oxford!*



*Chloe's beautiful good bye note. Jag älskar dig means I love you in Swedish. This still makes me really emotional.*